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PAULINE BY L. B. WALFORD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

MR. SMITH: A Part of his Life . . . 2 vols.

PAULINE

BY

L. B. WALFORD,

AUTHOR OF "MR. SMITH: A PART OF HIS LIFE."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1877.

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P A U L I N E

BY

L. R. WATFORD

Author of "The Story of the World"

Copyright, 1897



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CONTENTS

O F V O L U M E I.

PART I.

IN THE HEBRIDES.

	Page
CHAPTER I. A Gaelic Congregation	9
— II. One of the wild Blundells	27
— III. "Bite him, Punch!"	43
— IV. The Gour Burn	58
— V. "Would Compliments suffice?"	74
— VI. Off to Oban	89
— VII. A Talk in the Turret-chamber	104
— VIII. By-play at the Ball	125
— IX. "The Juanita is getting up her Sails!"	141
— X. "Good Night, <i>Dear!</i> "	153
— XI. "Aha, Ralph! run you to Earth at last!"	166
— XII. The Process	178

PART II.

BLUNDELLSAYE.

— XIII. The first Plunge	191
— XIV. Dot's Revelations	208

	Page
CHAPTER XV. That's what I think of Him!	220
— XVI. Two Ways of Looking at a terrible Man . . .	240
— XVII. Little Things put together	252
— XVIII. Sir John Finch	262

PART I.

IN THE HEBRIDES.

Sound itself was silent,
Save when the Atlantic swell—offspring of some dead storm—
Heaved up a billow to its memory.

P A U L I N E.

CHAPTER I.

A GAELIC CONGREGATION.

“SEINNIDH sinn chum cliù agus glòire Dhé——”

Such were the words which, startling in their effect and portentous in their signification, broke upon the ear of Pauline as she entered the parish church, after a walk of three miles in length, under the noonday rays of an August sun.

Enigmatical as was the sentence, its immediate effect was only too apparent.

Every collie present cocked his eye, leered at his master, and straightway composed himself to sleep.

The master's face was ministerwards; it was serious, and devoutly attentive. In his hand lay the family Psalm-book, and the unaccustomed thumb was being prepared—how, we need not specify—for its weekly duty of turning over the leaves. The service had begun.

What was Pauline to do?

The door had groaned and closed behind her, the atmosphere was that of the innermost recess of a range of hothouses, and there was two hours' endurance of it in prospect.

Well might her spirit sink.

The colliers could understand Gaelic, though they might not follow a sermon—*she* could not interpret a word! The dusty rays of a burning sun were grateful to their panting frames—*she* was suffocating! Each of *them* had his own appointed place—*she* was a stranger! In every way she was worse off than a dog!

How tired the poor girl felt! How hot, how disappointed, how cross!

The bare contemplation of that two hours' martyrdom made her shudder, and prompted the desperate suggestion that she might, even at this pass, escape. The object of her journey was lost, the expedition had proved a failure; but her heart rebelled against so great a punishment.

Could she by any means avert it? Dare she draw on herself the eyes of all those bowed heads, with the chance, too, of a snap at her heels from some canine bigot set to guard the door? or, more terrible still, a sudden cessation of those dissonant sounds in the pulpit?

Courage said "Yes;" Fear said "No;" and Fear had it.

She must endure to the end, put on perforce the outward garb of decent attention, patiently await—ah! with a wild, weird rasping cry, the sweet Psalm of David uprose.

Pauline shuddered from head to foot.

Mentally, as at that hour, she listened to the peal of cathedral chimes, and the mellow chant of white-robed choristers, and—measured the distance between her seat and the door.

A pause, another rapid jangle of incomprehensible phrases, a distraction of the worshippers, and the stranger had flown; she stood once more in the sweet, fresh, fragrant air outside.

With a long-drawn breath of relief, Pauline stopped for a minute to gaze on the scene around her.

A broad stretch of blue water lay at her feet, calm as glass, and to all appearance motionless, yet every minute laying bare more and more of the rocky tangle which overspread the beach, interspersed with shallow bays of smooth and glistening sand.

Thin fringes of birch and alder trees skirted the shore, and overhung the broad white road which encircled the island. Sloping backwards from these,

and with gradually increasing monotony, dreary wastes of moor, bog, and ravine carried the eye up to the ptarmigan-haunted peaks above.

Towards this prospect Pauline cared not to look. Her eyes were fixed on the pale, dimly-defined horizon; on the tiny islets which seemed to disdain and shrink from the water on which they rested, so carefully did they draw back their pointed headlands from contact with it; and on a large cutter yacht, which had cast anchor in the bay the night before, and which as it lay broadside, showing every spar and rope reflected, might have offered a prominent object for a painter's pencil.

She had watched the white sail of the vessel as it passed Gourloch on the evening before, and mourned its loss in the panorama which the sun, setting, spread nightly before their eyes. The white wing had been folded just as the heavens were lighting up, and it was folded still.

Not a sound came from the sea, and the strange discordant music within the little building alone broke the silence over the land.

Now must Pauline gather up her courage, and take to the road again.

There it lay, glaring in the fierce noonday heat, sheltered only here and there by the birches, and displaying itself in the distance in a barefaced ex-

tent of more than a mile in length, over a hillside, empty even of the shadow of a rock.

Pauline sighed. This was, in plain terms, more than she had bargained for.

When, against the persuasions of her relations at Gourloch, she had made her way to the little Highland church, she had been supported by a feeling of satisfaction, complacency, self-approval if you will, and her aunt had pled in vain.

"My dear, be persuaded. It rarely happens that our own service is put off, and for once we can read our Bibles at home. Such a long walk in this weather, and it is not our own church either!" murmured the lady, feeling a little ashamed of using such an argument.

"I suppose it is much the same, auntie; I never can distinguish between them."

"You have not studied the subject, my dear. But, however, that is not my real reason for wishing you to give it up. It is not for you to walk so far. Elsie has gone down to the shore, and taken her books with her. Come, let me find you something to read out of the library."

"Thanks, dear auntie, but I should like to go."

"You know, my love, how gladly I would send you if I could, although it is not our way to have

the horses out on Sundays; but really the grey is too lame to be used to-day."

"I always walk, thank you; we never think of driving at home."

Quietly and decidedly the stronger will had put aside the weaker, and, if she rued it, the blame was her own.

That "Seinnidh sinn chum cliù agus glòire Dhé" (Let us sing to the praise and glory of God), fell upon her ear like a knell. Nor was she, on reflection, better satisfied with the hasty and precipitate withdrawal, which must have seemed to scorn the simple gathering. How could she do it? She had been dazed, bewildered. She was almost, in her confusion, ready to re-enter.

But no! It was too late.

And then above and beyond the obvious causes for discontent previously narrated, it was no easy matter for Pauline to own that she had been in the wrong.

She would have to own it now, easy or difficult—both wrong in going, and wrong in coming away; she would have to walk in, dusty and dishevelled, two hours before she was expected, and make her humiliating confession. Her aunt would commiserate, and Elsie would rally her; of the two, she preferred the idea of being laughed at, and decided

that if her cousin had not quitted the shore on her return, she would seek her out, and they could make their *entrée* together.

With this there flashed a bright idea into Pauline's head.

The tide was still on the ebb, the short cut across the rocks would be passable. The prospect of this, with the sudden reaction of surprise and pleasure it inspired, gave a fillip to her spirits, under which she set off. More than a mile could be saved by crossing the bay, and the long ridges of rock, matted with tangle, and thickly strewn with mussels, limpets, and other shell-fish, afforded a tolerably secure footing.

Soon she quitted the road, and with light and active steps began to thread the mazes of the rocky territory.

All went well for a time.

True, she had frequently to retrace her path, and more than once narrowly escaped immersion in a hidden pool. Occasionally, too, she found herself perched upon an apparently inaccessible height, from which the descent was fraught with peril.

Still, with bare hands clinging to each projecting point, and dainty toes feeling tremulously for security under treacherous seaweed—too often but the veil of a pitfall—the advance continued.

It grew worse and worse. Her limbs began to ache, her face was burning shelterless under the sun, for, alas! that last spring had snapped the parasol in two, when she came to a full stop. "What shall I do?"

The poor wayfarer was tasting the experience common to explorers of short cuts.

It would seem as if short cuts are haunted by false-hearted sprites, who delight in tormenting such as venture unwarily within their bourn. Try one across fields, and you find half-a-dozen hedges in your way, each backed by a ditch and threaded by a wire. Follow an innocent-looking footpath, as did Christian and Hopeful in the allegory of allegories, and if you are not lodged in the castle of Giant Despair, you are straightway landed in a farmyard deep in mire, from which you look in vain for exit. View all the plain before you, and prepare to tramp it comfortably over a close-shaven, heather-burnt moor, and behold! an artful swamp lurks concealed, with moss and bog-myrtle and cotton-rush flowering on its surface!

Pauline, too far gone to retreat, came to the woful conclusion that another mistake had been committed.

The rocks, which at first had been mere ridges easily traversed, now seemed actually to tower above

her; the pools expanded into miniature lakes, and intercepted her path at every turn; while both feet and hands were smarting from contact with the rough and jagged surface.

Suddenly she became aware that she was not alone.

Leaning over a narrow strip of water which ran up between two ledges, was the figure of a man, so intent upon gazing into the crystal pool, that he was apparently as unconscious of her presence as she had hitherto been of his.

His hat was thrown off, and a suit of grey rendered his person so little distinguishable from the smooth surface of stone on which he lay, that had he not changed his attitude on Pauline's approach, she might have been still nearer than she was, without detecting anything unusual.

She turned to escape, her foot slipped, and down she went.

The stranger started, drew himself up, and stared at the apparition. How had she come? What did she want? What was she doing now?

An answer to the last interrogation was self-evident. She was helplessly trying to steady herself on a stone which vibrated to every inclination, her parasol protruded from a crevice many feet below,

and her long dress placidly floated on a neighbouring pool. Clearly she was in need of assistance.

"Wait a moment; allow me to help you."

Sooth to say, Pauline had no choice but to wait. She was careless as to the fate of her parasol, and ignorant of the misdemeanours of her robe, but to quit that tottering pedestal, when one false step would precipitate her into a briny gulf, was more than she cared to attempt.

Both hands clutched the rugged wall in front, he advanced, and one was unwillingly loosened and put in his.

"Take care! Not that one! This side! Ah!"

She was in! That last exclamation was called forth by a stumble, a moment's floundering on the slippery surface, and a splash.

The next instant he had seized her other hand, and, by main force, pulled her up beside him.

"Thank you," said poor Pauline, ruefully.

Short of a desert island there could hardly have been a more extraordinary and secluded spot for two well-dressed, well-bred, and well-looking young people to be standing hand in hand, whose acquaintance barely extended over a previous forty seconds or so.

The man saw the joke; the woman did not.

The hand which he held responded to his clasp,

with a fervour born of insecurity and fright; the other held on by his arm.

"Grips me like a vice," thought he. Aloud, "I hope you are not hurt?"

"Oh no—not much—thank you. The water is quite warm."

"Your parasol is in the hollow down there; I had better fetch it."

"*Pray* don't. Don't mind. It is of no consequence whatever."

"You will lose it; you will never find it again if I do not bring it now. If you can just stand still for one moment, I will jump down."

Now the malice of this suggestion consisted in the fact that to stand still was one of the last feats the unlucky fair one was likely to accomplish. The rock on which they stood was so cut up into detached and knife-like edges, that, even as she spoke, she swayed backwards and forwards, pinching his arm spasmodically with each oscillation, while every movement threatened another plunge.

"I shall take the opportunity to collar my hat," reflected the young man, "if she is ever going to let go, that is to say. Suppose you sit down for a moment?" to his companion.

As this proposal was accompanied by some assistance, it was feasible, and he was free.

And now, for the first time, it occurred to Pauline to look at the person with whom she was fraternising.

As his back was towards her, she naturally contemplated it first. A good back, broad-shouldered, straight, and supple, well set off by the odd sailor-like blouse of grey.

Now he was poking his head down the chasm from which, but nearly out of reach, the parasol poked up its head appealingly to him. Yes, a good head, too; a nice round head, covered with dark, smooth, soft-looking hair. Last of all she obtained a view of the face.

"Ah! what a pity!" cried the girl, inwardly; and with furtive glances she continued to scan it till he came back to her side, successful in both his quests.

For the face was—bad.

"May I ask which way you are going?"

Pauline could hardly tell. The idea of retracing her steps was scarcely to be borne—to push on seemed hopeless; she faltered and balanced the *pros* and *cons* in her mind.

At last her tale was told.

"I was nearly let in for that Gaelic service myself," said her companion; "my men found it out,

however, and warned me at the church door. So you are on your way to Gourloch?"

"Yes; I was told one could cross here when the tide was out."

"I should doubt it."

"You think it would not be safe to try?"

"Hardly."

"Considering," reflected the young man, "that you were staggering about like a new-born calf a few minutes ago, and are only happy now because you are sitting down."

"Then I must go back the way I came. Thank you," said Pauline, with dignity. She could be quite dignified as she sat on the rock.

He hesitated, and looked towards the sea. "The men are here. Will you let them put you home? Of course I shall accompany the boat," he added, hastily.

Pauline (aside), "And pray, who are *you*?" Outwardly, she only followed the direction of his eye with hers, and saw what she might have seen long before if she had looked—a large, beautifully-appointed gig, manned by four tidy British tars. "You are very good."

"Not at all. I shall be delighted to be of any use."

"It is barely half a mile beyond that head-land; you can see the tower from here."

"What a tremendous round it must be by the road! Five or six miles, I should say."

"Not quite so far, but still——"

"Long enough. You would not do it under an hour and a half."

("I am wet, besides," considered Pauline, who was wetter than she could well confide to a stranger; "and I am tired. And if I refuse and turn back, I must accept his escort over the rocks, for I could not possibly go crawling and falling about, as I did when there was nobody near. What a disastrous expedition it has been from beginning to end! Shall I accept? I wish I knew. The boat does look charming, and sailors are always nice; but I don't altogether like him. Still, if I return, he will come too; and if I go in the boat, there will be all the others. I wonder which would be best or worst?" A pause. "The boat is best.") "Thank you very much, if you are quite sure I am not taking you out of your way——"

("Married," decided the man—"married, and a woman of the world, or she would not be so cool upon it. I never said it was not taking me out of my way. However——") "Not in the least. Let me help you down."

"I cannot imagine," said the young lady, as they stood waiting for the boat, "how you did not hear me before I was so close to you; I made enough noise."

"I heard sounds, but thought my men had come ashore. It was not likely to be any one else, you must acknowledge."

"I did not hear any sound; you took me altogether by surprise."

"And had I not been there, should you have struggled on?"

"Yes, I think so. I don't like giving up what I have once begun."

"You might, if you had had good luck, have been a dozen steps further on by this time! I am sorry I retarded your progress."

"I am very much obliged to you." (Gravely, as with this protest, "So far as you have done me a service, I am bound to acknowledge it; otherwise, as yet we are strangers. Don't make jokes.")

The boat's crew now pulled alongside, and she was handed in.

"Delightful!" exclaimed the weary pedestrian to herself, as they sped over the water with a swift noiseless rush that in a few seconds left the promontory from which they had embarked far behind. "I cannot help being glad I came. It could not be

avoided; I had no choice. The men look respectable, and he is a gentleman, whatever else he may be. What an odd adventure! Poor little Elsie! how she would have enjoyed it! I wonder if she will be down at the shore when we come in! No one else will, it is to be hoped. Ah! how pleasant—how very, very pleasant it is! Now we are going over sand and shells; there scuttles off a little green crab under the weed. It is quite shallow too. Are those oysters, or only their shells? How beautiful are these great trees rising to the surface, and spreading themselves like feathery palms or giant ferns! Far, far down they go, into that deep, dark, invisible pit. If we were to upset here, I should be drowned. I should go straight to the bottom, and never rise again. Ah! I am glad we are off that hollow; the sand is rising again.” Thus dreamily her thoughts wandered on, as she hung in silence over the side.

“Might say a civil word or two,” inwardly commented the steersman, when some time had elapsed. “I thought all Scotch girls could talk.”)

“Is not this beautiful?” said Pauline, turning round.

“Very.”

“Nothing can surpass the scenery of the west of Scotland.”

“Nothing.”

"Especially on a day like this."

"Certainly."

She had made her attempts, it was his turn next.

"I hope you are comfortable?"

"Perfectly, thank you."

"You must be tired?"

"A little."

Discreet, if neither edifying nor original. The lady's turn came again.

"When I come to Scotland I never want to go away; and yet when I am away, I hardly care to seek it out again."

"Just what I have felt. But is not this your country?"

"No."

A pause.

"My home is in the south of England," said Pauline, feeling herself ungracious, "it is—different there."

He acknowledged a difference, observed that he too was a stranger, and another spasmodic silence ensued. Then with a gasp of relief they simultaneously rushed into the old, old topic of the weather.

Weather past, weather to come, weather at sea, weather among mountains; English, Scotch, and

Irish weather; the climates of all countries,—were discussed with an animation that left nothing to be desired.

Meantime the mental commentaries so ran:

“A fine creature. A nice womanly woman. A good daughter, good sister, good wife—oh! indeed! no wife at all,” as his eye fell on the ringless left hand clasped round the parasol—“no wife at all; wrong for once. Be that as it may, you are a wifely, motherly, daughterly girl, and I like you!”

“And you are an odd kind of man, I don’t know whether to like you or not.”

“Hollo! Hollo! Hey!”

“Tom!” ejaculated Pauline.

“Tommy!” cried her companion.

With that they turned and faced each other, the meaning of which was, “Pray what do *you* know about Tom?” and, “Pray what do *you* know about Tommy?”

“That is my brother,” said Pauline, smiling.

CHAPTER II.

ONE OF THE WILD BLUNDELLS.

"His face was of that doubtful kind,
That wins the eye, but not the mind."

Rokeby.

"WELL, you are a nice girl to go out for a *pleasure-trip* on the *Sawbath-day*!"

Astonishment and exclamations having been exchanged, the new-comer thus began.

"I did not, Tom. I went to church, and came back by the shore."

"Went by land, and came back by water."

"There is no crossing after all, or else I tried it too far down. I don't know where I should have been now, if I had not been most kindly rescued."

"By him? Many thanks," said the boy. He could not have been much over twenty, and was a smart, hearty, merry-go-round sort of a creature, with a loud voice and a laughing eye.

("What! You don't know him? Oh!") in answer to an aside.

"I say, Blundell, you must come up and have

Sunday dinner. That is the house among the trees; no distance, you see. I only turned up myself an hour ago; got a boat and ferried across at the Ross; and now my aunt says I should have stayed where I was, and not have travelled upon a Sunday. After my going to church too, on purpose to say that I had been!"

"You have been at church? Where in the world did you find one?"

"Close to the ferry on the other side."

"And how did you manage to arrive here an hour ago?"

"Well, I did not stay the *whole* time you know; I slipped out after the first fifty-five verses of the 119th *Psalm*! Eh, Polly?"

Pauline did not laugh.

"Your sister would have been glad to have been in your place, I daresay. There is nothing but Gaelic at Gourloch Point to-day."

"Is there not? I wish I had been there. I like to hear them screech and squall; it sounds as if you were sitting down upon a bagpipe. But you will come up, won't you?"

"Thanks very much, but I must get back—the men are waiting. You will excuse me, I know."

"I have not yet thanked you——" began Pauline. He smiled, lifted his hat, and was gone.

"I knew he would not come," said Tom, hospitably, "or I should not have been so keen to ask him. I knew that would send him off. What a queer old cracky fellow he is!"

"Old! Cracky!"

"He is half cracked, you know. Where is Elsie?"

"How is he cracked?"

"Aunt Ella said she was down at the shore."

"What do you mean by saying he is cracked?"

"I didn't,—I said he was *half* cracked; and so he is."

"How?"

"Oh, I don't know. The fellows say he is."

"Why should he not come to dinner when you asked him?"

"Because he never does; and we didn't want him, either."

Pauline pondered.

"He would just have been a bore," continued Tom, as they bent their steps inland; "and Aunt Ella would not have liked it, besides. Queer,—isn't it? They ought to suit each other, those two."

She had no idea what he meant. "How did you know him, Tom?"

"I have known him a long time. The question

is, how did *you* know him? I shall tell Aunt Ella of your gallivanting about with one of the wild Blundells, and see how she'll look!"

"It was unavoidable," said his sister, steadily. "I was in the very middle of the bay, and had come to a place where I could neither go back nor forward. You may imagine what a start it gave me to find a man close at hand, when I thought——"

"Oh, well," cried Tom, impatiently, "where is Elsie all this time?"

"Perhaps she has gone indoors again."

"She went out when I left. I came down here on purpose to find her."

"Here she is, then!" A laughing voice from behind a rock. "I heard you all the time, and saw you too. What have you been about? Really, you two scandalous people——"

"Speak to Polly, if you like," exclaimed Tom, seizing her hands. "If you don't look better after my sister another time, Miss Elsie, I shall think twice before I allow her to come and stay with you again. But I am innocent."

"Were you not with her?"

"Not I. She managed this nice little escapade all by herself. I have been here for ever so long,

as you might have known, if you had been anywhere but in this crazy, out-of-the-way place down here."

"How did you come?"

"I came by the Ross, got ferried across, and walked over the hill. Mind, I have been to church first, which apparently none of you have. And such a house as I find! Only Aunt Ella in it; you gone, no one can say where; and Pauline sitting cheek-by-jowl with a fellow whose name she does not even know, but with whom she seems vastly taken."

A brother's impertinence, ignored by the stately victim.

"Paulie, I wonder you let him treat an elder sister so!"

"Why, what did you say to her yourself, only a minute ago?"

"Never mind, tell me all about it," said Elsie, impatiently. "Did you find the church, Pauline?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I had to come away, Elsie: it was all in Gaelic."

"Oh! oh! oh!" with a scream of delight. "Oh, that is charming! Oh, you poor Pauline, you dear Pauline! and so you had your walk for nothing, and

your parasol is broken, and your gown is ruined, and, last of all, you got carried off by a pirate, and were only rescued by Tom and me."

"Come, I like that," said Tom. "What had you to do with it, may I ask? Sneaking behind that rock until you saw whether the pirate was going to demolish us or not."

"You would make a valiant ally in time of need, Miss Elsie; like old Blucher, you would come galloping up with a great dust, when all the fighting was over, and do the shouting part."

*'Zuheira-sa-sa-sa, und die Deutschen sind da,
Die Deutschen sind lustig, sie rufen, Hurra!'*

How long have you been hiding here?"

"It was some one else's shouting that made me look out. 'Hollo! hollo! hey!' and the echo cried after it, 'Ollo! ollo! ey!' What makes an echo drop its h's? They always do, you know."

"And you had seen none of us before?"

"No; the first I saw of anybody was when you were all down at the boat. I had heard the dip of the oars before, but it had not come in sight round the point. I concluded that you had come with Pauline."

"And I concluded that you had; or rather, that it was you sitting beside Blundell."

"Is that the pirate's name? What is he doing here?"

"Ask Polly. She knows all about him."

"I suppose that is his yacht, Elsie. He found me in difficulties among the rocks. I was trying to cross the bay as the tide was out; and just when I had got to a place where I could get neither back nor forward——"

"I have heard this so often that I am perfectly sick of it," interrupted Tom, rudely. "There was nothing so very wonderful in this great deliverance; you women always make mountains out of mole-hills. Blundell was fishing in his boat, Elsie, and picked her off; that was all!"

"He was doing nothing of the kind," said his sister, warmly. "He was not fishing at all."

"Wasn't he? Well, then, he ought to have been. I mean to draw him about his Sunday amusements, and you shall see how he rises to it. It was Chaworth who gave me the hint. Elsie, are the gooseberries over yet?"

"No, indeed, they are but just begun! You forget how much later we are here than you in the south."

"Then let us have a turn at them before dinner."

To humour him she complied, but Pauline, pleading fatigue, escaped into the house.

"We are best by ourselves," said Tom, confidentially. "Pauline always nags me to go indoors before I have had half enough! What have you got there? Green ones? Are they good? I like these yellow boys."

"You don't know what is good, then! The green ones have far more flavour. Those are called the honey-globes, but no one cares for them after the others are ripe. These little ironmongers are the best of any."

"Are they?" said Tom, with all kinds in his mouth at once. "Oh, I say, look here! My best *visiting* trousers!"

He had been kneeling unconsciously on a juicy red ironmonger, and the result was a deeply-imbedded stain.

"Something always happens to this pair, whenever I wear them," said he, ruefully. "They came from Smallpage, and are the only ones I have that don't bag at the knee! I put them on to-day, because it was Sunday, to please my aunt."

"It was thoughtful of you, Tom."

"Well, what am I to do? My things won't be here till to-morrow, and—it's getting worse, I do be-

lieve—there is not a soul to lend me a pair! What are you laughing at?”

“Nothing. Why do you not ask Mr. Blundell?”

“His? They would trail behind me like the spurs of a fighting-cock! I shall go on board his yacht, though. I say, Elsie, if he is here to-morrow, why shouldn’t we have a run in it?”

“Delightful!”

“You would like it, I can tell you.”

“But how could it be managed?”

“Oh, there is nothing easier. He is such a queer creature, you can make him do whatever you like, if you take him the right way. That’s what Chaworth says. You have only to take him the right way, and you can twist him round your little finger.”

“And how, if you take him the wrong way?”

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

“I should like to go,” said his cousin, “very much.”

“You wouldn’t be sick?”

“No, indeed! At least I think not.”

“What do you mean by you ‘think not?’ Have you ever been in a yacht?”

“No.”

“You know nothing about it, then. They are the sickest things you can go in. There is nothing I like

better than a little spanking 15-tonner, with a good sou'-wester to fill the sheets."

"How large is this one?"

"This? Oh, it's far away too big," contemptuously. "It is as safe as anything. Aunt Ella would go in this one herself, I daresay! It was a little wee thing that Guy was lost out of."

"Who was Guy?"

"Guy? He was the other one. They were the wild Blundells, you know. Such a splendid-looking pair of fellows! Chaworth said——"

"You have had enough, Tom. Come to the greenhouses."

"Chaworth said——"

"Look at this piece of heliotrope, peeping through the hinges. How can it have crept in there?"

"Chaworth said——"

"Shut the door after you."

"You are not listening to me a bit," said Tom, crossly.

Neither she was.

Meantime Pauline sat by her open casement, looking on the sea.

It was an old-fashioned lattice-window, set in a frame of ivy, and both sides were caught back to let in as much of the outer air as possible. The chamber was round, being approached only by a

narrow winding stair, which opened out of the gallery below; and the turret-room, as it was called, was appropriated to Miss La Sarte's use, whenever she stayed, as she usually did every autumn, at Gourloch.

Here she sat now, a tall, straight, dark-haired maid, with a thoughtful countenance, and calm, bright eyes.

Unlike Tom, unlike Elsie, unlike any one else in the world was Pauline.

It was this which made Tom rampant at the idea of his sister's adventure, and gave zest to Elsie's enjoyment of her defeat.

Pauline, the good, the grave, the handsome, the decorous, the everywhere admired and approved Pauline, to be caught tripping thus!

Elsie might have been wilful, and daring, and baffled, and made to look foolish as her cousin had been, and no one would have thought twice about it, whilst the whole house was now gaping at Pauline! Elsie would have been petted and pitied like a lost child; she would have come in bemoaning her fate; showing her hands and her face, her gown and her parasol; and all of a sudden she would have burst out a-laughing in the face of her comforters!

Pauline sits by her window, and her hands lie idly in her lap.

Through the balmy air come ever and anon the calls of sea-birds on the shore; the wild quivering cry of the curlew, or the lapwing diverting wayfarers from her young.

A slight breeze has sprung up with the return of the tide, wavelets lap the rocks, and ripple along the little bays and creeks of sand.

A long hour glides unbroken by, and the dreamer heeds it not.

.
A sudden attack upon the door; a double attack—one hand used for the rap, the other simultaneously turning the handle.

“Look here! why *don't* you come down? The gong is broken, Aunt Ella says, and you might have known. We have been waiting nearly half an hour.”

“I am coming, dear.”

“You might just as well read your good books after dinner as before,” continued injured Tom.

Pauline, as we know, had not been reading, and there were no traces of books to be seen, but she had forgotten to smooth her hair, and her bonnet still lay upon the table.

Tom looked at her. "Are you tired?" he said, gruffly.

"I am rather, thank you."

"What a wild-goose chase it was! Blundell must have had a good laugh at you."

They were going down-stairs, and she slipped her hand within his arm.

"Isn't he rather a—strange man, Tom?"

"I told you he was half cracked."

"He never once smiled the whole time, except, yes, when he went away."

"I don't know about smiling, but you should just hear him laugh. He and Guy were the jolliest fellows in the world. Wherever the Blundells were, there was a row, and every night they kept it up. They had half the county by the ears, and there they used to be roaring and fighting——"

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"What were you going to say?"

"I wasn't going to say anything. What do you mean?"

"What were they roaring and fighting about?"

"Oh, for fun. It was Guy who was the great hand; Ralph could be as quiet as a pussy-cat if he liked. Oh! the meekest, mildest creature, without a word to say for himself! So that all the old dow-

agers used to say, 'What a nice young man!' And he was, *very* nice!" said Tom, emphatically. "I say, you needn't tell Aunt Ella all this; we may just as well go in his yacht, and he is all right now. Do you hear? Mind you don't."

The last injunction gave Pauline food for thought. She waited her opportunity, and thus accosted her brother.

"Tom, if Mr. Blundell is not—not a proper acquaintance for us, I cannot help telling Aunt Ella. He ought not to come here, and Elsie and I should not go in his yacht."

"What rubbish! Of course he is all right now; I told you that."

"I don't know what your 'all right' and your 'all wrong' means," cried she, losing patience. "You say he is wicked, and he is crazy, and seem to glory in it, and yet you wish us to be intimate——"

"Who said anything about being intimate? The intimacy is a fiction of your own. You picked him up for yourself, and were intimate enough with him in all conscience when I came upon you!"

"You know how it was——" began his sister.

"Oh, for pity's sake, don't come to the place where you could get neither back nor forward, again!"

I know the very spot by this time! Spare us the recital, just this once."

"You are very rude," said Pauline, frowning.

"No, no. I'll be ready for it again to-morrow, and promise to listen to every word. Come, Polly-poddy, don't be cross; you know you want to have the sail, and so does Elsie, and so we'll all go, and have a day of it."

"If you are sure," hesitated she.

"Sure? Yes, of course I am. There is really nothing the matter with him, only that he has been queer ever since he and Guy were out that night in the North Sea, and Guy was drowned. Instead of getting away from the water, as you would think he might have done, he is always on it, and goes mooning about by himself, first to one place, and then to another. But he is quite the pattern man, every one says. I believe," he added, lowering his voice, "he thinks he'll go to hell, or something of that sort, if he breaks out again."

"Is that what makes you call him crazy?"

"Yes. That is what the fellows say."

"So now," continued Tom, as if a load were off his mind, "you know the worst of him. And letting alone that, he is as good a fellow as ever lived. Just the kind of man *you* would take to; he is not Elsie's style at all. I say, what a pretty little crea-

ture she has turned out, and what airs the monkey gives herself!"

"I don't think any one ever accused Elsie of that before."

"They will now, then. She shuts you up at every turn, and then comes wheedling after you, to get you to go after her again."

"It is only her way, you silly Tom. She means nothing by it."

"*Doesn't* she, then?"

"Nothing whatever. She is a mere child."

"A monstrous precocious child. Where on earth did she learn to flirt?"

"*Flirt!*" cried Pauline, angrily.

"Yes, flirt. I suppose it is born in a girl. Even a she-Paul will flirt, if she can do it on a Sunday, my dear sister," added he, silyly.

Pauline—blushed.

CHAPTER III.

"BITE HIM, PUNCH!"

"Now had I skill, I would right fain devise
To bring this high-born spinster to your eyes;
I could discourse of lip, and chin, and cheek—
But you would see no picture as I speak.
Such colours cannot—mix them as I may—
Paint you this nymph,—we'll try a different way."

CRABBE.

THE next morning, alas! alas!

Rain; soft, patient, persistent rain, not loud nor passionate, yet holding out no false hopes of giving way, set in with the daylight.

Low over the hillsides hung the misty veil; leaden looked the sea; piteous were the faces that surveyed it at Gourloch.

"Elsie, do you ever have anything but rain here?"

"Never! It poured the whole of yesterday."

"Yes, of course, if it is fine, it is sure to be on a Sunday, when one can't do anything."

"I had a presentiment that it would rain to-day."

"Clever of you, that. I have a presentiment that it will rain to-morrow, and the next day, and the next after that." Tom was out of humour, and the mischief found for his idle hands to do was teasing his cousin.

"It is no worse here than elsewhere," affirmed Elsie, smarting like a true Scot under their national disgrace. "We have had very *good* weather, particularly *fine* weather, until quite lately. I am sure I don't know why it should have broken just at this time," continued she, with a troubled look at the sky.

"And what is one to do the livelong day?"

"You might go and see Mr. Blundell," said a quiet voice close by. Pauline was standing with her back to them, looking out of the window.

"Eh? What should I do that for?" demanded her brother.

"You might find out how long he means to stay, and see what is our prospect of a sail."

"Well, I might do that. Perhaps he would take me with him to-day. I don't care for the rain, and it would be better than staying at home." (With a glance at Elsie.) "Men can't be expected to fad about a work-table all day like girls."

"Bring him back with you to entertain us," retorted his cousin.

Tom tossed up his head. "Likely, isn't it? He hates women."

No remark.

"He never goes anywhere when he can help it."

"Oh!"

"And so, as he won't come to me, I must go to him," proceeded young La Sarte with a lordly air, intended to convey that it was impossible two such choice spirits could be long apart. "He will expect me, I daresay."

"Hollo!" Three minutes later, in the avenue. "I was on my way to look you up. What a beast of a day!"

"Well, what have you got for me to do?"

Was he seeking Tom, as Tom was seeking him, from the sheer lack of any other source of entertainment?

They regarded each other earnestly. Should they fish? The streams were too high. The shooting of Gourloch was let to a stranger. Boating would be miserable; walking, stupid. Must they actually be driven indoors? It appeared the only thing to be done.

"I hope," said Blundell, as they walked up to the house, "that Miss La Sarte is none the worse for her wetting yesterday."

"Not a bit. At least, I never asked her. Isn't

it a jolly old place? Belongs to my aunt, as far as you can see on either side. She was a Macdougall; you would know what that means if you were a native; and since my uncle's death she lives here for the most part of every year. The pity is about the shooting. She might just as well keep some of it for me, even if she let the rest; it is rather hard on a fellow to come to Scotland in August, and get no grouse. I have given her several pretty broad hints on the subject. I should come down regularly if I could look upon it as a moor."

"I don't doubt it," said his companion, drily.

"And, of course, I should have it to offer fellows. I can't ask them down, as it is, when there is no shooting. Fellows who have asked me, you know. There was young Beauchamp; and Farey, Lord Farey's son;—they would both have come down fast enough, if there had been anything for them to do. I had to make up a sort of explanation about my aunt being a widow, and not caring to have a lot of people about. I could not tell them slap out there was no shooting, they would have thought it so uncommonly odd."

"Are you the heir?"

"No, another of us, my cousin, has the title and the B——shire estates. That is why my aunt lives here."

"And does he come in for this property too?"

"Oh no, there's Essie—I mean her daughter. A nice girl," said Tom, carelessly. "Sir Edward was only my mother's brother, but we do pretty much as we like here."

"And that was your sister whom I met yesterday? Do you know, the whole time she was with me she reminded me of some one, and I could not puzzle out who it was. Not that she is the least like you, Tommy."

"Is she not? She is thought like me too." (I suppose he means that she is handsomer, and she's not. I am quite as good-looking.)

"We are rather wet for the drawing-room, eh?" said Blundell, with a glance at his sea-soiled boots. "What do you think?"

"My aunt is awfully good-natured, and ——" sinking his voice, "the carpets are as old as the hills. Nobody minds about them. Aunt Ella," continued Tom, opening the door, "here is Mr. Blundell: what can we do to amuse him?"

"We will do our best," replied his aunt, pleasantly. She was a slight, graceful little thing, to whose opinions her nephew's exceeding deference seemed almost comical. "I am afraid we have nothing here very entertaining, Mr. Blundell," affirmed the lady.

"Perhaps Mr. Blundell will kindly entertain us," said a new voice, the other courtesies having been exchanged.

Turning politely towards the speaker, he beheld a rosy, golden-haired Hebe, in the first flush of her womanhood; a chubby, dimpled, rounded creature, whose mocking eyes were fixed upon him.

"I am dreadfully stupid," said he, with a drawl. Pauline, on his other side, jerked her netting-needle impatiently. ("He did not speak in that way to me," thought she. "What a disagreeable, affected, artificial voice! I knew I should not like him.")

Lady Calverley. "You were very kind yesterday in bringing my niece out of an unpleasant predicament. She was a foolish girl to try the crossing, and we may be thankful things were no worse."

"*You* would have laughed at us," said Blundell to Elsie.

"I am sure I should."

"It is never safe to try a crossing by the sea," continued Lady Calverley.

"I should not have tried it unless the tide had been going out," said Pauline.

"*I* could cross at any time," said Tom.

Then there was a pause. ("I wonder how I

could put up with him!" thought Pauline. "I must have been blind and deaf, or else he is altogether changed since yesterday.")

"Are you not a walker?" inquired Blundell, again addressing Miss Calverley.

"I don't care for walking, unless it is to get things. I should not mind it if I might shoot, or fish, or follow the otter-hounds; but walking for walking's sake is like taking medicine,—you wonder how little of it you can get off with, to do you any good."

Elsie, thankful for any diversion, conscious of charms, graceless and idle, sparkled with animation.

"I declare," speculated Tom, "she is trying her hand on Blundell next."

It was not her place. He had told her his friend was bored with women, and if he had by any chance come up to see Pauline, he ought to be talking to *her*. His aunt, too, merely putting in a word now and then; she should be taking the lead—she ought to *make* their visitor converse with her on this their first meeting.

Elsie was too free, too friendly, with a man whom she had never seen before. If this were the winning manner of which he had heard so much, he failed to appreciate it.

"What in all the world are we to do?" he reiterated, dolefully.

No one heeded him.

"Pauline, why are you fidgeting with that stupid work?"

"I did not know I was fidgeting."

"You are; and you have hardly done a stitch besides. Why can't you try to make yourself agreeable? Why don't you talk like Elsie?" in a low voice. "It all falls upon her. Neither you nor Aunt Ella will say a word."

"I can't talk to a man who turns his back upon me," said Pauline to herself. She was exaggerating, he had not turned his back; but the lady was nettled.

His back was not turned, but his shoulder certainly was. He was lounging over the side of the easy-chair, snapping his fingers at the pug in Elsie's lap.

Punch was growling, wincing, and quivering with indignation.

"Look at him, Punch! Bite him, Punch! Hist! Good dog, good dog! Don't be frightened, you little coward!" cried his mistress, full of the sport. "Punch, I am ashamed of you, to let yourself be tormented by a naughty, horrid——"

"Go on," said Blundell.

"Elsie, my dear, will you open the dining-room door, and see what luncheon is about? It is surely one o'clock."

Elsie jumped up with an instantaneous obedience edifying to see.

"One o'clock! It surely cannot be as late as that!" exclaimed their guest.

"It has been one o'clock *by me* for ever so long," said Tom, emphatically.

"A quarter to one," said Pauline, consulting her watch. "I think your clocks are rather fast, Aunt Ella."

"Yes, my dear, we keep them half an hour before the time, as our servants are always late."

"And that pulls them up?" said Blundell, gravely.

"They are obliged to go by the clocks, you know."

"Which they would not do, if you kept them to the correct time?"

"I don't know, I am sure. I wish I knew of any way to make them punctual," said Lady Calverley, herself the most unpunctual woman in existence. "I never can get them to do as I wish in that respect. Well, Elsie, are we to come?"

"No, indeed, mamma, there is no appearance of food; but there is a rush along the passage now

that betokens good. There is a sound of abundance of rain. Mr. Blundell——” But Blundell had turned to her cousin.

“Ah,” said Tom, cheerfully, “it will be all the better when it comes, Elsie! Here Punch, good old dog! you like me now, don’t you, sir? Take my advice and stick to me in the dining-room, and it will advance your best interests. The day is clearing, Aunt Ella, after all.”

What had made the day brighten, the dog good, and the late luncheon excusable, all at once, in the young man’s eyes? Pauline sedately conversing with his friend, or Elsie sitting by astonished and neglected?

“Elsie, come here; I have something to show you.”

She came hastily.

“It is only an old halfpenny; but never mind, let us be looking at it. I say, when are we to bring in about the sail?”

“*We* can’t bring it in at all.”

“Oh yes, we can, *you* can. You were chattering away to him just now easily enough. Think of something to put it into his head.”

“I won’t. He was quite rude to me just now.”

“Rude to you! How?”

"I spoke to him, and he turned away, and never answered me."

"He was not thinking of you, that was all."

"Then he ought to have been thinking of me," pouting, and looking angrily at the half-penny. "He should not be so taken up with any one that he cannot attend for a moment to another."

"Oh, you take no notice, that is the best way," advised he, by no means displeased at the tables being thus turned. "He and Pauline will get on together first-rate, for, between ourselves, they are both as mad as March hares. He is not in your line, my dear, at all."

"He has not a pleasant way of speaking. Sometimes I can't tell whether he is in joke or in earnest."

"What does it matter which he is? He is an old frump, and he is not half so good-looking as he was either."

"He is quite good-looking enough."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't call him so very handsome now. And black hair always turns grey soon."

"How old is he?"

"He is a long way over thirty, I know that. He was thirty when I left those parts, or, if he wasn't, he was precious near it."

"Look here!" continued he, turning her attention to himself,— "this mark, it shows wonderfully little after all. You can hardly see it in this light, can you?"

"No, no; it is not worth thinking about for a moment," impatiently. "They seem to have gone to sleep in the house to-day. No luncheon, nor anything."

"We are not starving; and when we have eaten it there will be nothing else to do. I am in no hurry," alleged the lad, defying that internal clock which had anticipated the hour so pertinaciously hitherto.

"For the first time in your life, then. I thought you were always hungry, and greedy, and everything else that a boy ought to be."

"I daresay I was. I was a capital boy in all respects," assented Tom, quietly consigning his boyhood to the past. "And you were not a bad little girl either, Miss Elsie. Do you remember the turkey's nest day?"

No answer.

"What are you listening to *them* for?" cried he, with a frown.

"Nothing—nothing. It was only to mamma. She—— What was it you were saying?"

"Nothing worth attending to. I am only boring

you. Mr. Blundell is a great deal more entertaining, no doubt."

"Tom, you silly boy, don't be ridiculous. I heard every word you said, till just at the last. I was thinking of something——"

"Oh, never mind. It does not in the least signify," tossing up and down the tassel of the blind, with a sham yawn, and an air of superb carelessness.

Elsie had no more to say; her excuses were suspected, and apologies would have made matters worse.

Now at last they were at one in their desires equally anxious for interruption, the announcement of luncheon was welcomed by both.

The day did not clear, according to Tom's prognostications, and the greater part of it had to be passed, even by him and his friend, within doors.

Five o'clock tea, however, was barely over, when, all at once, the sun shone out.

That more rain would fall ere night, and also through the night, was but too probable; but for the present there was a lull.

The pattering of heavy drops might be heard upon the laurel hedges from the trees overhead; blackbirds and thrushes did a brisk business among such hapless worms as had crept forth upon the

grassy paths; and the roaring of hidden waterfalls seemed all at once to become distinctly audible.

"Let us go and see the Gour Burn in flood!" suddenly suggested Tom. "What do you say, Elsie?"

A making-up, such as is in fashion among quarrelsome children, had been effected between them; and now, as usual, he appealed to her.

"Shall we, Pauline?" cried Elsie.

"Yes, yes, we will! For," subjoined Pauline, with exceeding demureness, "a whole day in the house is tiresome. One needs fresh air."

"My dear Pauline, what are you proposing?" Lady Calverley looked at her niece with astonishment. "Going out *now*! And it will rain again directly!"

"Now, mamma, don't say anything, *please*! It will be so delightful! And do make dinner a little later, so as to give us plenty of time. Come, Pauline! Quick! Before mamma can say a word!"

"Why should you not come too?" urged Tom. "Put on thick boots, and come. I'll carry you home if you fall by the way."

"My dear, I could not walk half-way there! And I cannot say I think you ought to ask the girls to go. Why cannot you and Mr. Blundell go by yourselves?"

Four gloomy faces made answer first.

Then, "It would be such a grand sight," murmured Pauline.

"I really think they ought not to miss it," pleaded Blundell.

Tom. "It will do them all the good in the world!"

Elsie. "We *must* go."

Further remonstrance would have been idle, and it was understood that Blundell was to return with them to the castle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOUR BURN.

“Thy gentlest sweep and boldest leap,
Thy rough rock walls, and plunging falls,
Thy foam-bells ringing free :
Thy pools and thy shallows, thy sun-woven shadows,
Thy startles and sallies, thy fern-glades and valleys,
Were early known to me.”

WITH revived spirits and glowing countenances, the little party found themselves out upon the moor, surrounded by dripping heath and fern, brawling streamlets, and glistening sheets of rock.

“Hi!” cried Tom, walking backwards in front of them, up a steep incline. “This is the kind of thing for me! What a pair of cheeks Elsie has got!”

“What a pair you have got yourself!” retorted his cousin, as though it were an accusation. “Do walk properly now: this is not a place to trip in.”

“Just what I should say it was,” tripping as he spoke, and pretending to lurch over the side. “Why did none of you catch me? That pool down there would drown a hay-stack!”

"Isn't it a splendid pool?" said Elsie. "And the rock opposite is called 'The Otters' Inn.' The otter, when he travels up to the lake on the other side of the hill, spends the day here, and proceeds on his way the following night."

"I should say he meets with cold comfort," said Tom, lightly. "It wad be sma' pleasure to me to bide in a hoose where there was neither parritch nor whusky — eh, Blundell? The Otters' Inn is not quite in the style of the old 'Goat and Compasses.'"

No answer.

"Do you and Chaworth go there still?"

"No."

"Where is Chaworth?"

"I don't know. Miss La Sarte," said Blundell, turning to his companion, "I suppose, by this noise, we are close to the fall now?"

"I knew I should draw him," whispered Tom, triumphantly. "Did you see how angry he was? He hates the very name of Chaworth."

"Then why did you mention him?"

He stared. "Why? Just for that, to be sure! Didn't you see how he turned to Pauline, and would talk no more to me? Oh, it was rich!"

"Elsie," said Pauline, turning round, "we are go-

ing down to the ledge: we shall not be away more than a few minutes."

"Is Miss Calverley not coming too?"

No; Miss Calverley declined the invitation decidedly: it made her so giddy, that never once, not even when she was a child, had she seen the fall. She would await their return where she was.

The other three crept down the bank, clinging alternately to branches of trees and points of rock. Pauline mutely declined assistance, for speech was unavailing. The hollow rumbling sound which had been loudly audible on the heights, was now a deafening continuous roar, as the volume of water, which had been considerably augmented by the recent rain, thundered over the cliff, and lashed the black pool below into a seething caldron of yellow foam.

The three adventurers, from their ledge, beheld the spectacle in silence.

Tom, his restless eyes roving up and down, as if to gather in every point of the picture, was still influenced by a certain amount of awe, for this was a sight to which he was unaccustomed; his sister, to whom it was more familiar, gazed thoughtfully into the depths; Blundell surveyed the scene with some degree of emotion, but of a kind so inscrutable, that it was difficult to guess whether it afforded him pleasure or pain.

Suddenly he motioned to the others to remain where they were, and disappeared up the bank.

"Miss Calverley, you really must come down. It is magnificent; and your cousin says you have never seen it yet."

"I should like to come so much," said Elsie, piteously; "but oh, if Tom were to touch me——"

"He shan't touch you. No one shall. You shall touch me, and that is all you need do. Hold on by my arm, and you can come down as safely as if you were on a highroad."

A few more entreaties, and she was persuaded.

Yes, wonderful to relate, she was persuaded. Shivering, miserable, yet excited and triumphant, she stood upon the ledge.

Pauline nodded her congratulations, and Tom clapped his hands in her face; but Elsie heeded them not.

She was holding on, as Blundell had told her, by his arm; and as wilder and wilder grew the hurry of the torrent, and more and more horrible the yawning depth below, she cowered the closer to him.

Strange cries, and shrieks, and groans sounded for her in the terrible din of the waters. Her eyes began to swim, her brain to reel. Well for her that some one at that moment touched her elbow. It was

only Pauline, unaware of the compact made beforehand, and kindly anxious to see if her cousin were uneasy; but it gave the last touch to the girl's nervous terror, and uttering a cry which was lost in the raging of the waters, she shot up the bank like a hunted animal escaping for its life.

The other three followed, grievous to relate, in convulsions of merriment.

Pauline's rare laugh rang out with the hearty, thorough enjoyment of one not often in mirthful mood; Tom see-sawed to and fro with the agonies of his delight; while even Blundell looked diverted, though politeness restrained him from giving way to the same extent as did the others.

Elsie, the first to ridicule herself upon ordinary occasions, reddened with vexation, and drew herself pettishly away from her cousin's protecting arm.

"Little Elsie," began Pauline.

"Oh Elsie, Elsie!" cried Tom. "Oh fie, Elsie!"

"It was my fault," said a kind voice, without a trace of amusement in it. "I ought not to have pressed it," continued Blundell, "but I could not bear to think that you were debarred from sharing our pleasure. Miss La Sarte, standing there, you reminded me of the 'Lorelei.' You know the old legend?

If you had taken your hat off, and let your hair down, it needed no more."

"Except that it should have been golden hair," said Tom, who had studied at Bonn, and had often enough sung about the "goldnes haar" with the wild students there; "and that Pauline would never lure any one to destruction. Elsie would make a far better 'Lorelei,'" he added, thoughtlessly.

"You are———kind," said his cousin.

"You are unfair to us all," said Blundell. "I had forgotten the purport of the lady's wishes, and only thought of her picturesque attitude. I had forgotten the golden hair, too, Tom."

"Oh, don't apologise: we are not offended; are we, Elsie? Quite the reverse. And as for Pauline, she knows you *meant* to be complimentary, whatever you might *say*."

Blundell's look said she might, and Miss La Sarte caught it.

"It is growing late," said she, hurriedly. "Let us come."

"And come you along with me, Elsie!" cried Tom. You and I will make it up on our way home. And I won't tease you, nor bother you, nor anything," he added, in more manly tones than he had yet spoken.

They set off accordingly.

"A nice-looking pair," said Blundell, looking after them. "If it is a fair question, is she quite grown up?"

"She would say *quite*, if you asked her; but one ought not to be reckoned very deeply accountable at seventeen—ought one?"

"It is to be hoped not," he answered, with a sigh.

"Oh," said Pauline, astonished at his taking it so seriously, "I was only thinking of my little cousin's playful ways. She has such bright spirits that sometimes, now and then, she may be misunderstood. Not, of course, by those who know her."

"Oh, certainly not. The sins of seventeen don't count for much anyway."

("Flippant," thought she. "I dislike that way of speaking.")

"You don't agree with me?" said Blundell.

"I think," said Pauline, with an effort, "that you do not mean what you say. You did not mean *sins*."

"Yes, I did. We may wipe out the sins of seventeen with a single stroke, I should say."

"Oh no."

"No?"

"We cannot wipe out one."

"Then may God have mercy upon us!"

The blood rushed to Pauline's cheek, and her heart seemed to stand still. What did he mean by forcing this strange conversation upon her? by this sudden fall from the smooth surface of ordinary topics to those deep themes which may not be touched but with awe and reverence? She did not know how to answer, how to speak at all. Tom's hints and confidences, was she to distinguish them from his ordinary rattle? Had he, for once in his life, kept within the mark?

Her pulses beat fast, as she took the next few steps in silence.

"I suppose you think me dreadfully profane," said Blundell at last, with a sort of smile.

"No, no;" that rendering not having even occurred to her.

"What then?"

What then, indeed! She could not well adopt Tom's phraseology, and state that she had been wondering whether he were indeed "half cracked" or not. But she was greatly at a loss; she could hardly bring herself to speak.

At last, "I know you are right," said she. "It is the very root of our religion. But—you took me rather by surprise."

"You take me by surprise now. I hardly understand what you mean." ("In fact, not at all.")

"Is not our only trust in the mercy of God?" said Pauline, reverently.

"Certainly."

"Well?"

"Well?"

They looked at each other.

"Apparently we are equally at sea," said he, at last. "I had better explain my views. I believe that we *can* wipe out the faults, follies, sins, if you will, of our youth, by a consistent determination to avoid them for the future. If we cannot do that, I say, God have mercy, for there is no hope for us."

He spoke sullenly in the tone of a man resolved to abide by his own judgment; and his gentle companion winced, even while she answered steadily, "That is not the Christian religion."

"How not?"

"If our only trust is in the *mercy* of God, how can we be expected to *justify* ourselves in His sight?"

"We must 'work out our own salvation.'"

"Work it out through faith."

A gesture of impatience. "Is that what you mean? I have seen quite enough of that sort of thing. Faith is a very easy stepping-stone to heaven. If a man does not lead a consistent life, he is very glad to take hold of faith."

"I should say he would be more glad to take hold of it if he *did*."

"Should you? Ah!"

"You are trying to do what you never can," said Pauline, roused by his slighting tone.

"What is that?"

"Make yourself fit to appear before your Maker."

"I can at least keep myself from being unfit."

She shook her head. Blundell set his lips as if determined to say no more, and an awkward silence ensued.

With vacant eyes fixed upon the ground they marched along in silence, equally anxious to renew the combat, yet each unwilling to take the initiative part. Finally they broke out together.

"Mr. Blundell——"

"Miss La Sarte——"

The voices ceased as simultaneously and as suddenly as they began.

"This is absurd," said he. "We need not quarrel because of a difference in opinions; and considering that our acquaintance only dates from yesterday, it is too much to expect that they should jump together all at once. That," he continued in a softer tone, "we must wait for."

"Oh no; we need not quarrel."

"By the way, we were more in sympathy yester-

day, were we not? We both tried the church, and were both driven away by the same cause to the same place. How curious to think of your being Tom's sister!"

"Have you known him long?"

"I used to have the boys over from school, and let them run about the place. Tom was rather a favourite of mine. I have only met him once since he went to Oxford, however."

"You wish to change the subject," thought Pauline. "Very well." But before she had time to say a word he recurred to it.

"Miss La Sarte, I'll tell you what it is. Religion does not come easy to a man. There is no use in saying it does. It does *not*. It goes against the grain. A fellow has to set his teeth hard, and *make* himself keep to the right road, or he will go in the wrong. When a parson—a—a clergyman preaches about faith and conversion, and those sort of things to us, he makes a great mistake. We want to *do* something—to take hold of something—that is, if a man is in earnest at all."

"Then, Mr. Blundell, what benefit do you suppose we derive from the death of our Saviour?"

"We are to be saved by it, if we lead a worthy life. Surely that is an easy question? Excuse my saying so."

"Can any one lead a worthy life?"

"Certainly. We can lead *unworthy* ones, at all events."

"We can *will* to lead a worthy or unworthy life, Mr. Blundell, but the power is absent, unless a mightier Power be working in us."

"Possibly. I know nothing about that. A man knows which way he is going, and it is of his own free will that he takes one direction or the other. There are the others waiting for us," said he, in a tone of relief.

"Did you get any berries, Pauline?" Elsie confronted them with scarlet bunches of the mountain-ash in her hand. "You shall have some of mine. I knew you would never think of getting any for yourself."

"Where did you find them, Elsie?"

"Where? Right across the path, to be sure. Only fancy, Tom, they never saw the rowan-tree, and we were ten minutes twisting off the sprays!"

"We were deep in metaphysics," said Blundell, lightly. "You ran away from us, besides."

Pacing the deck under the low-hanging heavens, ere night set in, a restless form might have been dimly visible, whose restless spirit thus communed with itself.

“So! I have begun already. It is a curious thing now, this faculty of mine! Go where I will, meet whom I may, it is always the same. What had I to do with the fancies of this brown-haired nun? She is one of those pure, guileless beings, in whose nature goodness is inherent; it signifies nothing to her that her creed is made of gossamer.

“Pah! What a farce it is! Do what you like, take your fill of all that is going, and then—heaven is ready for you.

“I am a dolt to squander sense against nonsense, in other words to argue with a woman—even a pretty one. By Jove! how splendid she looked, with that upward cast of the eye, and that colour in her cheek! I must try the effect again; I love to see a brunette burn.

“She shall not move me, though. Fool as I am, and fool of fools as I have been, there is a chance given to me yet, and as I am a man the devil shall have none of me. That sight, that face—will it ever cease to haunt me? ‘The one shall be taken, and the other left.’ My God! it was Guy—who was—taken.”

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“Ha! what have you got there? What book is that? eh? Did I not tell you I would have nothing

of that sort where I am master? Eh? Speak out! What do you say?"

In confusion under so sharp and sudden a charge, the delinquent stammered and stuttered.

"What do you say? eh?"

"It ain't a bad book, sir, in—indeed it ain't. Look for yourself, sir. It was so precious slow lying out here, all day long, sir."

The suspected volume was held up for inspection.

"‘The minister’s’—what, ‘wooing!’" read his master, with an expression of disgust. "Filling your mind with rubbish like that! Where is the book I gave you yesterday? Why do you not read it?"

"In—in my bunk, sir."

"And there it may remain, I suppose. I might have guessed as much. You will come to no good, I can tell you, Jerry, if you go on like this. There is more mischief done by blackguard books of this sort——"

"Please, sir, have you ever read it?"

"I? No, indeed!"

"It's by a lady," insinuated the culprit, eyeing the book lovingly, and then looking to see what effect the intimation produced.

"What has that to do with it, pray?"

"Might be more delicate, more properer," murmured the lad, with crest-fallen countenance, as

feeling that he had expended his last shot, and missed.

"You be hanged!"

The piteous expression and the pitiful apology were too much; Blundell burst out laughing, and passed below.

"There spoke the true blood! That was wild Ralph back again!" Blake, the captain, had heard the end of the discussion, and witnessed the retreat. "Blest if I don't jump i' my skin to hear them good old words pop up, like the cork out of a sody-water bottle, when it can't be kept down no longer! Ay it was different in Guy's time. Bless us, it *was* different!"

"It ain't the woin' itself he objecks to, d'ye see?" said Jerry, slily. "It's only the readin' of it." (Whistling).

"Duncan Gray cam' here to woo!

Ha! ha! the woin' o't!"

which ancient ditty he had lately picked up in the Highlands, and relished extremely.

Blake paused. "So that's it, is it?" said he, with slow perception. Then, lifting his thumb, he jerked it over his shoulder at the grey tower, which was by this time barely distinguishable in the shadow of the hill.

Jerry nodded.

"Whew! We are in for it then, Jerry, an' no mistake!"

CHAPTER V.

“WOULD COMPLIMENTS SUFFICE?”

“The noble desire of pleasing may degenerate into coquetry, but coquetry is its caricature.”—FREDERIKA BREMER.

FOR the five following days, rainy mist, and misty rain, shrouded both sea and land.

The offer of a sail in the *Juanita* had been made and accepted; for Lady Calverley, pleased with Blundell's address, and satisfied with her nephew's assurance that his friend was one of the best fellows in the world, saw no objection. But the dawn, when it broke, invariably showed the same disconsolate prospect, and the expedition had to be postponed.

He must come up to the castle instead; and Tom's "You'll look us up in the morning, at all events," was the understood conclusion to every meeting.

"Could anything be more tiresome?" moaned Elsie, when on the fifth day the heavens still gloomed as heavily as ever. "He will go away soon. We shall never have our day—our delightful day: we

shall look back to this time all our lives, and say, like the emperor of old, we have 'lost a day.'"

"And it is so calm, too," murmured, in gentler accents, Pauline.

"Quite perfect," added her brother; "just the right kind of day for a sail. Not a breath stirring anywhere. We should be lying opposite the Point from morning till night, drinking champagne and talking metaphysics, eh, Polly?"

"I suppose there is hardly enough wind—I had forgotten that."

"Enough? Do you imagine Blundell and I would stagnate on shore all this time, if there had been enough to puff out a nautilus-shell? He is regularly stuck here, that is why he is so thankful to come up day after day. He'll be off with the first breeze that suits."

"It will be very mean of him if he is," said Elsie. "After saying so much about our going. We may never have such a chance again."

"You can't expect him to stay for that. He is on his way to the Lewes, and only put in here for the Sunday. He is as strict as a parson about that, you know—a precious deal stricter than many a parson would be, too. It is of no use Aunt Ella's asking him to dinner on Sunday, by the way; he would have to do penance half the night after it."

"Is he a Roman Catholic?" cried Elsie, opening her eyes.

"Something very like one," reflected Pauline: "I did not think of that before. Such a religion would naturally commend itself to his mind, if it is as Tom says. How stupid of me not to find that out! He has given me every opportunity."

Tom had not answered, being intent on a curve in the shepherd's crook he was whittling out of a hazel rod.

"Tom, why did you not tell us before?"

"Tell you what?" holding the stick at arm's-length before him.

"That he was a Roman Catholic."

"That who was? What are you talking about?"

"Mr. Blundell."

"Blundell!" said Tom, putting down the crook, and looking at her; "what on earth do you mean?"

It had all been a mistake; Blundell was as sound a Protestant as any one among them—he had only used the word penance in jest.

"Though I daresay he would like to say masses for Guy's soul," continued Tom. "He has never been heard to mention his name since the day he died; and you see he has broken with Chaworth and the whole lot of them. He is quite a reformed character, Polly. Take my blessing."

Elsie glanced at her cousin; but it was impossible to discern whether she heard or not.

"I wish he would take me off with him," began Tom, after a pause, during which he had been whittling most industriously. "How jolly it would be!"

Silence.

"That is to say," he relented, "for a week or so. Of course I should come back here again. Why do you look so grave, Elsie?"

"It would be such a disappointment."

"Would it? Would it really, Elsie?"

"So few yachts ever come here; and the ones that do, never belong to people we know. Once Mr. M'Phail offered to take us in his; but mamma said he was a shopman, and would not let us go. I did not care what he was; I would have gone, and so would Pauline. And now when mamma is quite pleased and willing—she is going herself if her cold is no worse—it is rather hard."

"I am sorry for you," said Tom, seeking to hide his chagrin under the guise of pleasantry. "Perhaps, however, it is as well that you are not particular as to your company—a shopman or a scamp—you will be all the more easily pleased."

"Tom! What do you mean?"

"Pauline knows. She does not mind, you see,

so why should you? She, like a wise woman, is content to 'take the gifts the gods provide' her, and ask no questions."

Elsie looked from one to the other, scanning the two faces, between which there was so strong an outward likeness, so little real resemblance.

There was the same rich russet-brown hair, deep-set eyes, delicately-cut nose and chin, and warm colour in the cheek—but here it ended. It penetrated no deeper. It was lost in the expression of the eye and lip—lost in every word and thought.

They might have been taken as two distinct types of the race from which they sprang.

Pauline was a Huguenot of the past century, Tom a Frenchman of to-day.

Earnestness, sobriety, and elevation of purpose distinguished the sister; instability and careless ease characterised the brother. It was impossible that there should be sympathy between them; but there was a perfectly good understanding. Tom was fond of his sister, and proud of her, even while ridiculing her scruples, and disregarding such gentle admonitions as she occasionally sought to administer. He was fonder still of Elsie. An unkind word from *her* cut him to the heart. Her presence made him a man.

The three were assembled in the comfortable

old-fashioned library, where, when alone, they usually spent their mornings.

The visitor who had daily joined them of late had not yet appeared; and so agreeable had been his society, so thoroughly had he contrived in that short time to become one of themselves, that they were at a loss what to do without him.

Some time had passed without Pauline's taking part in the conversation.

She was musing with troubled eye and flushed cheek, until roused from her reverie by the sound of her own name.

Elsie was regarding her and Tom alternately, and Tom's "She is content to take the gifts the gods provide her," fell with meaning on her ear. Her eye flashed, and the colour started to her cheek.

"I took a brother's word," she said.

He had gone too far. One way or other he must eat his words; but what to Pauline would have been mortification unspeakable, was a light thing to Tom.

"I thought I should draw her," he said, gaily. "He is right enough, Elsie—I only said it to tease Pauline."

"You said it to tease ME."

"You? no. What did it matter to YOU? He is

Pauline's friend, not yours. Think of a saint like Pauline taking up with a sinner like Blundell!"

"When will you give up that foolish habit of saying a thing and contradicting it the next moment?" cried his cousin. "Soon it will come to this, that no one will believe a single word you say. You knew you were talking nonsense to Mr. Blundell about Punch yesterday: there is nothing of the Willoughby pug about him; and he was given to me because his tail was too long, and his muzzle too pink."

"Punch may thank me for giving him a pedigree, then," replied he. "If it had been the other way, I could understand your indignation, but I was doing the very best I could for the old fellow."

"That was it! You wanted to make him out to be something fine, knowing all the time he is not."

"And pray, what greater proof of friendship would you ask for?"

He was incorrigible; Elsie betook herself to generals.

"I do hope you will be more careful before Uncle Macleay."

"Who, pray, is Uncle Macleay?"

"He is my uncle—double-distilled essence of uncle; there, make what you can of that. Come,

read me my riddle, I beg you to say, how is he my uncle, this Uncle Macleay?"

"Poetry, Elsie! and you a Presbyterian! Eh, lass, d'ye no ken that pawerty and profawnity gang han' in han'?"

"If you think you can talk Scotch, Tom, you can't. It is the one thing you can not do. I advise you to leave off attempting it."

"Uncle Macleay speaks it more correctly, no doubt."

"I daresay he does. All very old people do——"

"Oh, that's glorious! I shan't give up hope then; in time I too may become a proficient."

"You are so stupid. Uncle Macleay is a dear, good, kind old man, whom everybody likes; mamma will be very much vexed if you are rude to him."

"When did you ever know me rude to anybody? I have not the slightest intention of maltreating the aged relative; on the contrary, I have no doubt we shall become the best of friends. "But," affecting alarm, "he won't expect me to converse in Gaelic, will he? It would be cruel—barbarous; I have not time to prepare—I have not even a dictionary. Help, Pauline! help! It is a trap, a snare, a device of the enemy; let us save ourselves by flight before the attack begins."

Pauline raised her head, and beheld foolish Elsie wincing under this profound satire.

"You are mistaken, Tom," said his sister, quietly. "You are preparing a surprise for yourself when you see Dr. Macleay."

"How?"

"He is one of the finest gentlemen I ever met in my life."

Here was a statement! Here was an occasion for Tom's face to lengthen, widen, open, and spread itself out in every direction that could indicate extreme amazement.

Amazement, not incredulity—Pauline must ever inspire belief—but it was speechless, unwilling amazement.

Even Elsie looked appalled by the strength of her ally, and doubtful for a moment of the ultimate value of such assistance. She could not have said so much. Affectionately indignant as she had been on her great-uncle's behalf, in her heart she had been framing apologies for him; she had been conscious, under the brilliant scintillations of Tom's wit, of a secret desire that he had timed his visit otherwise.

Pauline's *coup* at once placed him on a higher level; and if Pauline would but stand to it, if Dr. Macleay would but justify her eulogium, his niece's triumph would be complete.

Quick as thought she followed the lead. "I am only afraid of what *he* may think of *you*," said she.

"Very true," said Pauline.

But, unfortunately, she smiled. Tom laughed, then roared, and was himself again.

"We are very ill behaved," all at once cried his sister, jumping up and kissing her cousin merrily. "We are dreadfully in need of some one to come and keep us all in order."

"And here he comes!" said Tom, significantly. "Here he comes!"

"Oh, here he comes!" echoed Elsie. "Here he comes, Pauline!"

Pauline could not imagine what they meant. How should Mr. Blundell keep them in order? What could make Tom so absurd? Mr. Blundell was no very good example for any of them. Idling away his time, as if he had nothing in the world to do but amuse himself. Tom would never settle to anything till he went; and Tom had promised so faithfully to read, during this term.

Which of the schools was he going in for?

The conversation was quite edifying to listen to, when Mr. Blundell came in, to take his part, and be appealed to, and have his opinion discussed.

Then came the walk, and Tom's whisper to Elsie to let Blundell and his "Lorelei" go first.

"Aunt Ella said we were to be sure to let her know if he came, you know, Elsie, to be proper, and that; so, as we haven't done that, we can send them on in front, and you and I can mount guard behind."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Not nonsense at all. I know that was what she meant. She told me to be *sure* to let her know. I said, 'All right,' and bolted. Now this is how I make it 'all right,' you see."

"She won't be pleased, Tom."

"I can't go back for her now."

"Let us go on with them, then,"

"Go on with them! What should we do that for? They don't want us, and we don't want them. We have far better fun by ourselves. Now I'll tell you all about what I am reading for. It's all bosh what Pauline says, you know, about my not passing; I mean to go at it, when I go back, I can tell you. Now, are you attending?"

When they came back from the walk Dr. Macleay had arrived, and was in the drawing-room.

He was a man of remarkable appearance. In person tall and spare, his features, naturally striking, were rendered still more so from being shaded by a

profusion of snow-white hair, which also softened the effect of a skin somewhat roughened and weather-beaten by constant exposure.

His smile was good-humoured; his whole aspect mild and benignant; but it was like the gentleness of the great ocean as it sighs itself to sleep after the tumult of many storms,—like the quiet of the forest when there are no leaves left in it to rustle.

He was a widower, and childless.

For many years past he had led a useful and unostentatious life in one of the Hebridean islands, holding an authority absolute among his own people, and undisputed, if not definite, over other parishes. He was now engaged to stay at Gourloch for three or four days, but longer than that they hardly hoped to detain him.

"You remember my niece Pauline?" said Lady Calverley; "and this tall boy? No? He is her brother. And—our friend Mr. Blundell."

"And—our dog Mr. Punch," subjoined Elsie. "Mr. Punch, shake hands. You needn't bow, in case it should turn into bow-wow. See how good he is! He always knows exactly how to behave himself, and he always barks at the right people."

"Witness my reception," said Blundell. "He suspected me for two whole days,—did not give me the benefit of the doubt, which every man has a

right to. One ought to be looked upon as an honest man till proved a rogue, Punch."

"A dog's code is the reverse. You have to produce credentials of honesty before he will believe you are not a rogue. And I am not sure," continued Dr. Macleay, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, "that he has not common-sense on his side."

"Those collies at church on Sunday, every one of them suspected me," said Pauline; "and they must have had their worst fears realised. Dr. Macleay, do you think dogs ought to go to church?"

"Certainly not, Miss La Sarte. I command my old Trim to stay at home every Sunday, but——"

"He does not obey?"

He laughed and shook his head.

"Does he follow you into the pulpit?" asked Pauline.

"Not exactly; he waits at the bottom of the stairs. I pretend not to see him till we are at home again."

"And what would he do, if some one were to rise and leave the church?"

"I cannot say; he has given me no precedent to judge by. Were any of you unwell on Sunday?"

Pauline, with spirit, related her adventure; but

as she proceeded, her principal auditor became grave.

"I very much doubt that crossing," he said. "The people about here may know when to take it, and probably have landmarks to guide them across, but, Miss La Sarte, it is not fit for you. What would you have done if Mr. Blundell had not been there? The tide might have been back upon you before you had got half-way! Take my advice and don't try unknown crossings again; you may not always find a deliverer so handy."

She laughed and promised. She would not be tempted in future; but she could not wish to undo the past.

Did he, her so-called deliverer, share the feeling? Apparently he did. His eye boldly sought hers, as he interposed—"You do not grudge me my good fortune, sir?"

"Very much indeed," replied the Doctor, with alacrity. "You are most unreasonable to suppose I could help grudging it. A man who goes about staring into pools of water ought not to expect to see any image reflected in them but his own. Especially——"

A significant movement of the head interpreted the meaning of the unfinished sentence.

"Nobody pays you and me any compliments,

Punch," said a low voice, talking softly to itself, "Never mind, Punch dear, we don't want their nasty compliments!"

"Wise little woman!" said her uncle.

"Silly child!" said her mother.

Everybody said something — good, bad, or indifferent; and, in the hubbub, some one who had stooped down to pick up the dog's collar, whispered a few words which reached no ear but that for which it was intended, "How could you say that? Would *compliments* suffice?"

CHAPTER VI.

OFF TO OBAN.

“It is ill playing with edge-tools.”

It would not be easy to describe the state of Blundell's mind at this time.

He was unhappy, aimless, and idle.

His nerves had received a severe shock from the terrible scene of which he had been a witness, and his consequent solitary wanderings had not tended to restore their tone.

Having broken away from all his former associates, he had no resources but in himself; and the life he had elected to lead for the remainder of his days had, in six short months, palled upon him.

The impression he had received was still too powerful not to keep its grasp upon his conscience; but he was restive under it, wretched and miserable.

At this point he meets Pauline.

Here is a woman, so good, so pure, so true, that she would seem to have been placed in his path, to lead him forward on the way to heaven.

Here is a beautiful, rational, lovable creature, all that fancy could suggest, all that reason could require.

Now then, why may he not go in and win?

She is free, that is certain.

An affected misapprehension, an elaborate apology, and three words from Tom, have set that point at rest.

What holds him back?

The prospect is bright, serene, perfect in all its details, and—it cannot allure him.

It is Elsie's doing.

Ah! that little chit! What business has she to interfere with his happiness? What business has that saucy smile to come between him and those grave, starlike eyes?

She is but a plaything, a child. A good child enough, but still a child. Nothing in her—nothing.

He amuses himself now and then with the little puss? Of course he does. Why should he not? He likes children. They are great fun. He likes to tease and trick them, and cause them to cry and pout, and then kiss and be friends again.

Miss Elsie is rather too old for the kissing, but that only makes it the more piquant.

He laughs to think how she would have be-

haved supposing her to have been the fair adventuress on the rocks! He fancies how he could have terrified her by tales of quicksands and swiftly approaching tides! How he would have rallied her on her forlorn appearance! on her charming spirit of enterprise! What sly allusions he would have made to it afterwards, and how cross she would have been with him—for the moment!

With this he falls to considering what the real heroine of the act looked like; how she spoke, how she clung to his arm, how haughtily she held him at a distance one minute, and how helplessly she appealed to him the next!

He had never seen anything more charming than the reserve giving way to eagerness, girlish and natural, when he proffered a rescue.

What a fool he had been to think of her as married! He might have known—might have seen—might have guessed—could not imagine how he could ever have supposed such a thing! Pshaw! She was as unsophisticated a creature as possible, and he had called her a woman of the world!

The pendulum oscillates towards the Pauline point.

The more he thinks of her the more he sighs for her.

His soul loathes the memory of his wasted youth; he shrinks from it—turns from it.

“Pauline, Pauline, I want to love you. I want you to love me. You were sent to me. You ought to be mine. You would help me—would teach me—make me good as you are. And I *can't!* I *can't!*”

His head falls down upon his hands, he breaks out into sobs and tears.

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After the rain came wind.

What had before been a dull, slate-coloured, unbroken surface of water, was speedily changed into a raging sea, of varied hues and unceasing motion.

Friday night saw the change; and the boat which brought Blundell ashore on Saturday morning rocked so violently, even in the sheltered part of the bay where he landed, that the utmost caution was needed to prevent its bumping on the rocks.

“This is a new experience,” said he, cheerfully. “We are going the round of bad weather in all its shapes. It is something not to fear being ice-bound—not that I should care, but the Juanita would. I am off to Oban to-night.”

The effect of this announcement was electrical. Lady Calverley uttered a soft ejaculation of

"To-night!" and by an irresistible impulse glanced at her niece.

Pauline stirred not, raised not her eyes, but her countenance betrayed, by a curious, almost imperceptible *something*, that she had heard.

Tom's mouth, from force of schoolboy habit, puckered for the whistle which his maturer judgment refused to sanction. But Elsie alone, with dilated, sorrowful eyes, deprecated the cruelty of the sentence.

"And we have never had our sail," said she.

"You would not come to-day?"

"Why not? There is enough wind, is there not?" with eager gaze fixed upon him.

"Enough? Oh, quite—a feast!"

"But you are going yourself?"

"Not I. We should be tacking from morning till night. I shall walk to the ferry."

"And the Juanita will meet you?" said Tom.

Blundell was looking at Elsie—Elsie who was hanging upon his words as if her very being depended on them.

Could he disappoint her in such a trifling matter? Would it not seem unkind, rude, a poor return for all the kindness he had met with? The whole party looked disconcerted by his leave-taking.

Thus in a few seconds of time all was changed.

"The Juanita will remain where she is. Miss Calverley, we may have better weather when I come back."

"You are coming back?" she cried, with sparkling eyes.

"Certainly. I hope to turn up again in a few days, like the penny of evil repute."

"Oh," rejoined Elsie, pacified, "then you will come in for our harvest-home."

"You are not going to have a harvest-home yet? The corn is not down."

"We are obliged to have ours beforehand, as we dance in the big barn, and it will be more than half full afterwards. Will you come?"

"Am I to come, Lady Calverley?"

"It will be very good-natured if you do. We are much in need of support. And you will allow your sailors to come likewise, I hope? They would be quite acquisitions."

He wished she had not asked them—wished, almost wished at least, that she had not asked him—wished from his heart there had been nothing to ask either him or them to. Whenever he desired to break away, he seemed to be hemmed in afresh. An excuse he might have made certainly: his brother had only been dead six months, and during these

he had gone nowhere, he had joined in no festivities.

But such an apology never once occurred to him, so strong in his mind was the feeling of aversion on other grounds.

Why had this nuisance turned up just now to add to his complications? What had a good woman like Lady Calverley to do with rioting and vulgar revelry? What would his men think, on whom he enforced abstinence with such an iron hand?

With a bland and grateful smile, "Thank you," he replied—"only too happy!"

"You will bring the old place down about your ears, Mary," commented her uncle, who had entered and silently greeted the visitor whilst the arrangement was being made.

"My dear uncle, we have our harvest-home every year, and have never had an accident yet."

"Half a hundred roaring, stamping, thumping ne'er-do-weels, every man-jack of them bent on digging his heels through the floor if he can——"

"And no one enjoying the fun more than Uncle Macleay," cried his saucy grand-niece. "And he has got to make a speech afterwards, which we have not. So *Viva!* How we will dance instead!"

"You dance?" said Blundell, with an air of surprise.

To be sure we do, and you must dance too. Tom's dancing is the admiration of everybody."

This was enough—Blundell would not now have absented himself on any account.

"Well, I *hope* I shall be back in time," said he; "I will do my best. If I do not appear, you will know it is no fault of mine. Can I do anything for anybody in Oban?"

Nobody wanted anything done, and he rose to go; having announced his intentions, he could not now draw back.

"But Elsie has got your stick!" cried Tom. "Elsie, you must give it up. You try mine, and you will find it is just as light; or if you don't, I can cut you another to-day."

"Which won't be ready for a week. I will fetch it," to Blundell. "But you must let me have it when you come back. I can't walk about without one, now."

When she came down again, he was waiting for her in the hall.

"There, take it!" said she; "you will need it to help you across the 'Englishman's Sorrow.'"

"What may that mean, Miss Calverley?"

"Nothing," colouring under the gravity of his reply. "Only a name given to part of the Mohr

Ben particularly difficult to climb. You will be glad of your stick then."

"I should be glad of a straightforward answer now."

She was struck mute.

"You meant that I should be glad of something to comfort me when I am away from you."

He had intended to put her in a passion, and had succeeded.

"How—how can you? What——" cried she, trembling all over. The door opened.

"Hush! never mind! It was all a joke; only a joke, mind. Don't be cross with me. (Louder.) By the way, this Highland ball, am I to have the honour of opening it with you?"

She could not speak.

"Oh, you are not gone?" said Tom, in the doorway. "My aunt wants to know if you won't have luncheon, or wine, or something?"

"It could be on the table in five minutes," said the lady's voice behind.

"No, indeed, thanks. I shall get something at the ferry."

"Well?" to Elsie.

She turned away. "You can't dance a reel."

"I can't dance anything, but I think I can dig

my heels into the floor as hard as even Dr. Macleay could desire! Will you be my partner?"

So he wrung from her a sullen consent ere he went.

"*He* can't dance, indeed!" cried Tom, not over well pleased with what he had heard. "That's rather good, I think. When there was not a wake, nor a fair, nor a lark of any kind going, within twenty miles of Blundellsaye, but he and Guy were in the thick of it!"

"He would not learn much dancing in that way."

"If he had not dancing he had drinking."

"Does he drink?" said his cousin, in a low voice.

"Drink? no. You can't watch him very closely, or you would see that for yourself. He won't even allow his poor fellows their glass of grog; and looks such daggers at the decanters here, that it is positively uncivil. I can't get my mouthful of port after dinner, for him. No, he doesn't drink, *now*."

"Was he very bad, Tom?"

There was an air of good faith about Tom, which compelled a certain amount of credence, even from the most sceptical of listeners.

"Bad as bad could be. The hardest drinker in the county," impressively. The slightest opposition,

and he would have substituted "in England," but Elise was subdued, and he had only to proceed. "They were both getting quite bloated and bottle-nosed. Then Guy dropped off, and Ralph pulled up. Just in time, I can tell you."

"He does not look as if——"

"Oh yes, he does. A man could tell it in a moment. Depend upon it," knowingly, "Uncle Macleay sees it as well as I do."

Apparently Dr. Macleay did, for shortly afterwards he took the opportunity of questioning young La Sarte more closely about his friend than any of the rest of the party had thought of doing.

Tom was in his glory. "I knew him when I was at Stow. His place, Blundellsaye, is not far from there. He was in the Life Guards," feeling as if each statement clinched his man's respectability more satisfactorily than did the one before it.

"Indeed! you knew him very well?" rejoined the old gentleman, carelessly.

"Oh, by Jove, yes! All our fellows knew him. We were often over there. The most splendid place," proceeded Tom, launching out — "quite a palace, gardens, grounds, everything. And shooting — no end of shooting, best shooting in the county. Have you ever been in Berkshire?"

"Not lately. Not for several years."

"Perhaps you have seen his place?"

"Perhaps I have, but there are a great many fine places down there."

"Yes, of course," rather taken aback. "Of course, the first county in England for good houses."

"Do you think so? I am not sure that I agree with you. But it must have been a great thing for you to have had a good friend, near at hand, in your school-days."

"Well," said Tom, with a little laugh, "I don't know that he was a particularly *good* friend. They were a little bit wild, you know, he and his brother; but we don't say anything about that here."

"A married man?"

"Oh dear no—never was a less married man, I should say."

"He seems to be very much at home with you all?"

"Quite a tame cat about the house. They all like him, you see; my aunt is quite taken with him."

"Your aunt!" thought the Doctor. "I wish your sister may not be taken with him too! He is doing his best to make her, and this rattlepate sees nothing!"

"Rather got the better of the old boy," reflected Tom. "Put him off the scent completely. Scored, and no mistake!"

Dull and spiritless was the party assembled in the drawing-room after dinner that evening.

Dr. Macleay, indeed, did his best towards re-animating the little circle which had lately been so full of life and gaiety, but nobody seconded his efforts. Dry as dust sounded in their ears the topics of the day—bald and flat the chitchat of cheerful garrulity. Tom was uneasily watching his cousin, who was restless, flighty, and out of humour; his aunt was oppressed by a nervous headache, and the howling of the storm, which had increased towards night; and Pauline seemed chiefly anxious to be left to the indulgence of her own thoughts.

No one asked for music, no one cared for tea, no one seemed willing to do anything the others wanted. Of the three young ones, it may be said that each one of them was in a more unreasonable, contradictory, pick-a-quarrel mind than the other.

“Elsie, let us have a game at backgammon?”

“Oh no.”

“Chess, then?”

“I hate chess!”

“Bézique?”

“Mamma does not like the sight of cards.”

“Cards? It is the most innocent game in the world! Who ever heard of gambling at bézique? And I suppose that is what she objects to?”

“There is not a pack in the house, at any rate.”

Tom raised the question, "What shall we have?"

"Nothing."

"You are in a nice mind to-night," said he, eyeing her. "May I ask if I have done anything to offend you?"

Poor soul! no. That power was not in his hands. If he could but have offended her, there might have been hope for him.

"No, Tom," said she, wearily, "how should you?"

"It is all very well for Pauline,—she never favours us with much conversation; the only difference is that to-night we are to be deprived of any—but you, this is not your way at all. Some people might even insinuate that a certain small personage in days gone by was called a chatterbox—eh, Elsie?"

"Oh, I can chatter, if you like! There is so much to chatter about, is there not? Plenty of fun and news, and everything is so lively and entertaining, ourselves in particular."

"So that's it, is it?" said he, slowly. "You are dull. I am sorry; I might have guessed that before. It is stupid work for you to be left with only us and Dr. Macleay to amuse you——"

"To be *left*!" said Elsie, rather pale. "What are you talking about?"

His bolt had struck. He could only answer

gloomily, "You know best," and silence fell between them.

"Tom, I beg your pardon; I was very disagreeable. Please, Tom, forgive me."

He nodded, with a watery smile in his eyes that touched her heart.

"Tom, I will play any game with you that you like."

"Elsie, I had rather you did not *play* with me at all."

CHAPTER VII.

A TALK IN THE TURRET-CHAMBER.

“Wer? Ich? Ich eines Mannes Bild
In meinem reinen Busen tragen?
Dies Herz, von Himmelsglanz erfüllt,
Darf einer ird’schen Liebe schlagen?”

Jungfrau von Orleans.

NEXT morning found them all in better minds, as became the day. The elements likewise had exhausted their angry feelings. All was bright and peaceful.

Dr. Macleay conducted divine service in a small church within a mile of the castle, the relieving a sick brother of his Sabbath duties being the primary object of his visit there. He had been unable to come the week before, and hence Pauline’s walk and its consequences.

“Paulie, do you not think it was a little, a very little too long?”

“No, Elsie, I was surprised when it was over.”

“So was I, for I thought it would never be over. But I should not say so to any one but you.”

She was nestling her head down in her cousin’s

lap, over which the golden hair, unbound, fell like a veil. The two had retired to the turret-chamber, had settled themselves within the little recess, and, I grieve to add, had bolted the door against poor Tom, who was hovering somewhere in the vicinity.

"It was a beautiful sermon," said Pauline.

"Yes, I daresay. Mamma is always in such spirits when Uncle Macleay is going to preach. I had not a word against the sermon, Paulie; only I thought it might have been said in a little less time. You have not such long sermons in England?"

"Our service is longer, much longer. On the whole, they come to the same in the end."

"To tell you the truth, it was Tom I felt for. He kept changing his arm about, and fidgeting with his rose, and it put me out so, that I grew as bad as he. Then I did wish Uncle Macleay would have left out the words 'fourthly' and 'fifthly;' it would not have called one's attention to its being such a length if he had said all he had to say, without marking the intervals so emphatically."

Pauline laughed.

"Paulie, I always think you are so good about our church."

"Don't you know that I am a Calvinist by descent?"

"And I am a Lutheran by inclination. Your churches, or better still, your cathedrals, I do delight in them! I would never go to a Presbyterian church again if I could get to one of these. Does this one of ours not strike you as horrible when you first come? Does it not, Paulie?"

"The music is rude, certainly," replied her cousin; "and the building—well, the less said about it the better. But the people and the preacher—— Elsie, do you ever think what a noble life your uncle leads? When he was talking last night, telling us those strange wild tales of what he has actually himself gone through, has known, and seen with his own eyes, he seems to me to turn into one of the heroes of the first Church, 'full of faith, and power, and the Holy Ghost,' going from place to place teaching and preaching, in spite of every kind of danger and hardship. How lightly the things of this world seem to sit upon him! He is not ignorant; he knows and is interested in all that is going on, far more than any of us are—but he chooses not to mix in it. And such abilities, such energies, as he expends upon these simple people! I never heard the Word of God explained with greater *care*, greater *pains* than we had it to-day. The language was so well chosen——"

"Paulie, you are quite enthusiastic."

"Yes, I am; I felt *stirred*. It did one good to be there."

"I am glad he came when you were with us."

"And the people, how attentive they were! And what long distances they had come!" continued Pauline—the romantic, as well as the devotional side of whose character had been touched. "Did you notice how they sat almost motionless from first to last, as if they would not lose a word if they could help it? I could not keep from thinking of the 'two or three' gathered together, for, after all, we were so few; but I do believe, Elsie, He was in the midst of us."

"Then only Tom and I were naughty," said Elsie, ruefully. "I saw how you were listening; and when he stopped, if your eyes had not been so firmly fixed upon him, I should have thought you had been asleep, you started up so."

"Asleep, dear?"

"I know you were not, of course. You sat like a statue from beginning to end. You are a very good Pauline."

"Elsie!" Pauline was actually blushing. "I am ashamed to tell you, but—but—I was not attending at that moment. I don't know how it was, but just then my thoughts had wandered, and the end did take me by surprise. I was thinking—for I ought

to tell you the truth—whether the sea-air would take the colour out of my lilac hat if I were to wear it when we go in the yacht!”

“Then you are the best Pauline that ever was, to come and confess it! And I love you twenty hundred thousand times better for that, than if you could repeat the sermon word for word from beginning to end.”

“I don’t know how it was,” pleaded Pauline.

“Never mind how it was; you looked so good, so perfect, sitting there, in that pretty white lily bonnet; and then to think—— But, Paulie, I don’t mind telling you now,—I did not listen *at all!* I hardly heard a single word, I was so restless; and I could not help thinking of other things all the time. Indeed, I do usually attend to Uncle Macleay, and never found his sermons long before.”

“You were thinking?” said her cousin, slowly.

“Yes, about all sorts of things. Paulie, how strange this last week has been! We seem to have been living quite in a world of our own, don’t we? Isn’t it odd, when one comes to remember that it was only this day week you first met Mr. Blundell?”

“Elsie, I want to say a word to you—about Mr. Blundell.”

“What about him?” a quick movement, a sudden alertness of reply.

"You see we have only Tom's word to depend upon for all we know of him. And you know what Tom's word is. I daresay he may be quite correct on some points—indeed Mr. Blundell has let us know that of his own accord; but Tom contradicts himself so, as to others, that it is impossible to trust him."

"I should think it was."

"Dr. Macleay let drop a hint of this kind to-day. Not in the least as if it concerned any of us; he only suggested in a general way that young men were not the best judges of each other, and let me see whom he was thinking about. I could hardly tell how it was done, but somehow it startled me to find how completely we are in the dark as to what he *is*, though we may know what he *has*. So I thought I would just remind you, Elsie."

"But why me?"

"I was afraid that perhaps you might have been—thinking—about him, dear."

"Who? *I*? *I* think!" exclaimed Elsie, in unfeigned astonishment. "What can you mean, Pauline? It is *you*, not *I*——"

"Elsie!"

"This is all very fine! You, who are so wise, and so busy with your nice little motherly admonition—take care of yourself, Madam Pauline! No,

you need not turn your great eyes on me with that pathetic look—don't you think that I have eyes as well as other people? Yes, mamma, is it you?" in answer to a tap at the door.

"I am come indoors, dear."

"Yes, mamma, I'll follow in a moment. Where is my Bible?" said Elsie, looking about her. "So," kissing her cousin, "farewell for the present; and, Pauline," in her ear, "there is an old song that runs—

'Look well to thyself, and take care of thyself,
For there's nobody cares for thee.'

For '*nobody*' read '*somebody*,' my dear."

Tuesday dawned, Tuesday broke into a gracious, glorious summer noon-tide, Tuesday drew towards night.

In the little room, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, Pauline is braiding her brown hair; in the vast untidy wilderness below, Elsie stealthily crimps her golden locks. Tom, in the white attic above them all, resolves with infinite satisfaction on the absolute necessity of a second shave. He sings as he is dressing: his heart is light, for his cousin has been more than usually gentle with him all day. Not a word has passed among the three as to any expected arrival.

They have all assisted at the decorations, visited the barn, and inspected the supper-table.

Now they have retired to make their toilets, for the lanterns are being lit, and it is long since the first guests made their appearance.

"They're come!" Old Davie was nodding his head in at the drawing-room door, his breath short with excitement. "They're come! The men are come!"

"Which men, Davie?"

"The men—the men from the yacht." (He pronounced the word exactly as it is written.) "Will I put them in the barn with the rest, or take them in my room?"

"Which shall he do? Pauline, say." Lady Calverley was apt to depend upon her niece.

"Is it not time for all of us to go? That would make it right either way," suggested Pauline.

"Eh! which does her leddyship say?" cried the old man, who was deaf, and troubled with many cares. "They are waiting down by a' this time."

"Ask them to go in," replied his mistress, with dignity. "We are coming now ourselves, Davie."

"Ye mun wait till the folks are in. The carpet's no doun yet. Eh, my leddy, ye *mun* wait," for she was advancing. "There's a carpet for the haill

length o' the road, an' whae's it for but yoursel, an' the Doctor?"

"We did not need a carpet, surely. It is quite dry to-night."

"Ye mun hae your carpet," resolutely rejoined Davie. "It's no consistent that ye should be walkin' wi'oot a carpet this time o' the night."

"So much trouble," murmured she, giving way, however.

"Let them tak the trouble. Oo, ye may lauch," muttered ihe old man, offended at the merriment he saw on every side; "but when there's naebody but me, and a' the folks to see to, an' this an' that, it's weel there's some—ay, ay——" mumbling all the way he went, as he trotted down the passage.

"*Noblesse oblige*, Aunt Ella," said Tom, gaily.

"And he has not been long, at any rate," added the Doctor, as Davie, returning, flung open the door with an air of ignoring the previous contention, and announced magnificently. "The people are waitin' your pleasure, my leddy."

Forth they sallied: Lady Calverley in her comfortable black velvet, with an eye to the draughts, and the airy nature of the ball-room; Pauline and Elsie in their white frocks and woollen wrappers; Dr. Macleay and young La Sarte in their chilly,

cold-giving, evening suits, which they had not been allowed to evade even for once.

"Be as you always are; it is best," Tom's aunt had replied, in answer to his piteous appeal; and the Doctor, with his usual good-humoured "Well, well," had given in at once. Tom must perforce give in likewise.

"Now, Elsie!" He claimed the right to stand up with his cousin.

"You know I promised to dance the first with Mr. Blundell."

"Blundell!" as if it were quite a new idea. "He is not coming, depend upon it. He never meant to come; it was all smoke about his being back in time! Twenty to one he sends for the Juanita to Oban! Come!"

She hesitated.

"You need not wait for *him*!" cried Tom, contemptuously; "you must begin, the people are all looking at us. If he comes, there is Pauline."

She suffered herself to be persuaded—she could not help it.

Then began the scene forecast by Dr. Macleay. The shouting, the stamping, the digging of heels into the rafters; the full flow of a Highland reel was at its height, though the dancing had not yet assumed the daring, joyous, out-and-out character

which would follow later in the evening, when there was a movement of curiosity at the lower end of the ball-room, and a tall stranger walked quietly up one side to the corner where the hostess and her party were assembled.

"You did not wait for me," said a voice in Elsie's ear.

She was standing still, on the outskirts of the Reel a Thulichen, whilst Tom and a swarthy young shepherd strangled each other in the middle; and had seen him come.

"You should have been here in time," retorted Miss Coquette, throwing back the golden head with all its wavy *rouleaux*; "I could not keep the people waiting."

"Not five minutes? And I have walked twenty miles to be here to-night."

"You cannot be fit for dancing, then. Go and sit by mamma. Pauline is not dancing, either," she added, significantly.

Then her turn came again.

All the lookers-on had collected round this set, and Tom was the hero of the moment.

"Yaish, yaish—a pretty lad—a weel-faured lad. An' goot at the danshin. Ay, ay—very goot at the danshin. An he'll be for Miss Ailshie, wull he no? I'm shoor! An he'll be for the shootin', and the

feeshun, an' whatever else. An' thonders the English laidie, sister to him—that'll be her shentleman, is it no? An' a pritty man, too. Deed ay. What for no? Tougal, my man, is there nae word o' the Talisker?"

The "Talisker," indeed, was singularly long in making its appearance, and eventually it leaked out that none was to be forthcoming till supper. This was a new thing at Gourloch, where the lady's hospitality had hitherto been exercised entirely through her factotum Dougald, and there had been whisky in abundance.

On this night my lady, with decision, gave her orders that it should circulate more sparingly.

"They seem very merry," observed Blundell, who stood by Pauline's side, looking on the scene with an aspect inappropriately stern; "wonderfully merry, considering what a world we live in! Some people would go dancing to their graves, I believe!"

"This is surely an innocent enough amusement," replied she, in some surprise. "These good people enjoy themselves thoroughly after a very harmless fashion. And I must say I prefer it as a spectacle to what one meets with in our modern ball-rooms."

"I never go to balls."

"Hark to Blundell!" whispered Tom to his cousin, as the last words reached their ear in the

sudden lull caused by the cessation of the music. "He is coming it strong, is he not? He thinks that will take with Pauline, you know. I daresay he never goes to balls; and why? Because they used to be too soft for him, and now he is too soft for them."

"You never go to balls!" said Miss La Sarte, in answer to the last remark.

Then she paused for two reasons.

She was no ball-goer herself, but a sudden repugnance seized her to naming what might appear to be a coincidence of opinion; also she did not know what now to say.

"I am here to-night against my will," continued he. "Life is too great a matter to be spent in jigging about like idiots or mad people."

"This is hardly a question of spending lives, is it?"

"I see you are bent on defending it at all hazards. I am sorry to disagree with you, but I thought in a matter of this sort *you* would have been on my side."

"Is it the dancing itself you dislike, or the gathering together for any amusement?"

"Either—both. Every one here would be better at home."

She almost laughed in his face. "Pray don't

say so to my kind aunt—she would be quite distressed. I am very sorry you are not enjoying yourself; but, since you are here, you must try to bear with us for a little.”

He recovered himself.

“What a bear I am! Miss La Sarte, you must let me alone when I am in a temper like this. Could you not see I was only trying to make myself disagreeable? Yes, you could, you must have seen it; and you would not allow yourself to be provoked; you are too gentle, too merciful. But one thing you have done, you have made me ashamed of myself. Pray forget, if you can, the nonsense I have been talking.”

She was about to reply, but some one else claimed her attention.

It was an ancient dame, inquiring, with profound respect, “Wull ye no be danshin yersel, young laidie?”

“I am a bad hand at it, Nelly.”

“Oich, fie! It is yersel that sayes it. It is not that, neither.”

“No one would care to have me for a partner.”

“Deed ay wad they then! Deed wad they too! It is Tougal wad be the prood man——”

“Come with me,” said Blundell, hastily; “that is, if you will. You shall forgive me thus.”

"And you and I will stand opposite to them, Elsie," cried Tom.

"Oh no, indeed! I must not dance with you again. It is Dougald's turn now; he is already rather out of countenance because I did not begin with him——"

"Oh, never mind him, the next will do——" began Tom.

"Your cousin is right," interposed an angry interfering voice. "Why should you wish to keep her from amusing herself? Miss La Sarte and I need no *vis-à-vis*; we are quite willing to sit down again. In fact you would rather, would you not?" turning to her with an "*I would rather*" written in his face.

She meekly acquiesced, and they retreated as spasmodically as they had advanced.

"So you've hung fire, have you?" said Tom, coming back with a rosy-cheeked, straight-backed matron whom he had selected. "And Elsie's off too! Never mind, Mrs. M'Corquodale, we will take our places here, and some one else will be sure to come. Here you, Hector, there's no one here. That's right. Now we're ready."

"Tom is in great force," said his friend, observing him narrowly.

And indeed the gaiety and good-humour of the

young leader of the revels won the hearts of all around him. Easy without being familiar, genial yet not jocose, his genuine and hearty abandonment to the pleasures of the evening placed him in a light so favourable that Lady Calverley was proud of her nephew, Pauline of her brother.

Elsie, infected with a like spirit, flitted hither and thither, all smiles, sparkles, and animation.

She and Tom by their united exertions left no one unattended to, and the good-humour and admiration of the company rose to a climax when the pair of blithe young creatures hand in hand came gaily bounding down the middle, amidst two long lines of faces awaiting their turn in the old-fashioned country-dance.

"Now then, up there, look alive! Begin a set, you people in the middle! That's right, Alister! Come along! Now, Elsie! Polly, what are you about? Why don't you and Blundell have a turn? It's the best fun in the world!"

Thus prompted, there was no escape for the recusant.

Hitherto, although Miss La Sarte had danced, he had not been her partner; he had been leaning with folded arms against the wall, silently looking on. He had now to ask her inclinations, and as

they were not antagonistic, places were found for them.

"Mr. Blundell does not help half so much as I thought he would," whispered Elsie to her cousin. "Is there anything the matter with him?"

"Not in the least. We were having rather a sober conversation just now, perhaps that is it?"

"Oh, is that it? But you might keep your sober conversations for another time; we want every one now to help in making it pass off well."

"You and Tom are doing that."

"Tom is a host in himself," said Elsie. "Tom, I am praising you. You are behaving admirably. I don't know really what we should have done without you. I only wish other people would do their parts equally well," she added, distinctly.

"Miss Calverley thinks we are shirking our duties," said Blundell to his partner.

"Not Pauline." Elsie looked up at him with fearless eyes. "But I do think you might exert yourself to be a little more generally agreeable."

"Ought I? What must I do? You sent me away yourself, and told me I was not fit for dancing."

"You might go about among the people, and talk to them."

"But I am not to dance?"

"No one would expect you to be very much inclined to jump about after a twenty-mile walk."

"Have you walked so far to-day?" said Pauline. He had not told her.

Blundell laughed. "I am not quite such a poor creature as that comes to. My walk was only a good preparation. It is you who have stopped my evolutions," to Elsie. "It was you who laid the embargo on me, which prevented my showing off this evening. I might have been twirling and pirouetting in the midst of as admiring a circle as gathered round Hector just now, if you had not commanded me to forbear."

"You are wonderfully plausible. Pray, when may we expect to see you begin? I shall be one of the admiring circle of spectators."

"You still will not trust me?"

"How trust you?"

"You will not dance with me?"

"*Elsie!*" It was Tom, with a stamp of the foot in his voice, and hands stretched out for hers. Before she could answer she was whirled away.

After all, it had been rather pleasant nonsense, and of course he had had to make some excuse; it was absurd that he and Pauline should sit flirting together the whole evening; she hoped there would be an end to that for the present, at least.

The country-dance was over, and the indefatigable performers were grouping for the last reel before supper.

"Elsie, you had better dance with Blake. He is Blundell's skipper, rather a swell, and he is standing there with no one to speak to. Now, Mr. Blake, Miss Calverley is going to take you for her partner this time."

"Me, sir? I'm, I'm—its pertickler kind of you, sir, and of the young lady——" with a bow to each. "But I ain't quite right on my legs—borned that way. Very much obliged indeed, sir." And the flattered skipper retreated, thinking vastly higher of the entertainment than he had done previously.

"You had better take one of them," counselled Tom. "They are all hanging together like a pack of sheep! Here you," said he, catching hold of our friend Jerry, and thrusting him forward—"you stand up here: and mind you do your best, for you have got Miss Calverley for a partner."

Jerry, fiery-red to the roots of his hair, and retreating inwardly from all his garments through very limpness, obeyed; and Tom, bidding his cousin keep the set open for him, turned away to match together and hustle to their places as many more of the company as had not already paired, and

could give no good reason why they should not be joined together.

"Am I to have the pleasure, at last?"

Blundell had heard Tom gallantly soliciting the hand of the blooming village schoolmistress, and had found his way down to the lower end of the room forthwith.

"No, indeed! I am dancing with one of your men."

"With *whom*?"

"One of your sailors. There!" indicating the unfortunate Jerry, who stood confronting her with a face so drawn and withered, that the strongest solution of alum poured down his throat could alone have produced a like result.

"Jerry," said his master, quietly, "go and find some one else. And know your place better another time," added he, in a voice that threw yet more alum into the already stiff potation.

"As if it warn't bad enough already," muttered the poor lad, as he turned away. "An' I could ha' sworn it was the t'other one too."

"How dared the fellow presume!" exclaimed Blundell, passionately. "How could your cousin allow it! Pray forgive me this unintentional annoyance," taking her hand; "such audacity——"

"It was not his fault. He was told to do it."

"Told! Who told him?"

"Tom did, from me."

"From you? It was a great mistake. Tom should have known better—he should not have done it."

"He should, if I told him."

Her heart was swelling proudly, but she would not hear the absent condemned. At the moment, in her confusion of spirit she fully believed that the idea itself, not merely the acquiescence in it, had been hers.

"It was a great mistake," repeated Blundell, dictatorially. "You ought not to dance with men like these."

The hand he held was snatched from his. "Excuse me," said Miss Calverley of Calverley, with the frown of an empress; "it is for me to judge what I ought and what I ought not to do in matters like this!"

And without another word, she left him.

CHAPTER VIII.

BY-PLAY AT THE BALL.

"But court na anither—though jokin' ye be,
For fear that she wile your fancy frae me."

BURNS.

HERE was Elsie in a new light!

He had seen her grave, merry, bold, timid, and on the verge of tears, but whatever might be *her* mood, she had never moved *him* in the slightest degree before.

Now, the child had suddenly asserted her womanhood, and discomfited him. He looked so foolish, so crestfallen, standing there where she had left him, that he felt an explanation was due to himself. Due, but to whom? Pauline, of course. It did not occur to him to care whether any one else had observed the incident or not.

Apparently Miss La Sarte was too deeply engaged in conversation to have observed anything. Her face turned upwards, her slim, willowy figure was slightly thrown back from the waist, and she was smiling. He thought he had never seen her look

so well, but he thought it with a pang, for some one else had looked equally well a moment before.

The smile was still upon Pauline's cheek when he approached—a pre-occupied, interrupted smile, with which he had nothing to do. He was compelled to wait ere he could gain her attention.

“I had to put a stop to your cousin's dancing with one of my men,” he began. “A rough fellow. Lady Calverley would not have liked it. It was Tom's fault——” here he remembered he was speaking to Tom's sister, and stopped.

“Tom is thoughtless,” said she, indifferently. “It did not occur to him, I daresay.”

“Nor to your cousin either; she is much displeased with me.”

“Is she? I daresay you deserve her displeasure.”

(“*You* are coming out in a new light too!” cried Blundell, inwardly. “What is the meaning of it?”) Aloud, “Why should you suppose I deserve it?”

“Why should she be displeased with you?”

“She thought I was scolding her.”

“Then probably you were. I have no doubt my cousin behaved admirably, and”—with a charming smile—“you must excuse me now, I am going to dance with Mr. Carr.” Which, being interpreted, meant that Pauline was very angry.

Mr. Carr was a clumsy young man, whose figure appeared to have made up in quantity what it lacked in quality.

As (having taken Lady Calverley's shooting) he lived in a rude hut on the moor, with no accommodation in it for any one but himself and his servant, it might be supposed he was sometimes rather at a loss, and she had bethought her of summoning him to assist at the harvest-home.

His assistance proved pretty much what might have been expected.

He had no interest in the proceedings beyond as they amused himself; and as he had not appeared for an hour after the time specified, and had then found his hostess alone, save for the company of one white-headed old gentleman, he had meditated a speedy retreat.

The discovery of two pretty girls belonging to the house party had changed his mind; and he was considering which of the two to begin with, when his heart suddenly sank like lead. He had caught sight of Blundell and Tom, both in evening dress.

There was no reason why the spectacle should have affected him. It may be a matter of opinion whether or no he was not the more correctly attired of the two; certainly had he been in full dress, and

the rest in morning clothes, it would have been infinitely more unpleasant.

But on this point numbers always have carried, always will carry, the day.

The consciousness of being comfortably and suitably clad fails to make happy the man who is habited unlike other men, especially if his is the convenient, theirs the becoming attire.

From this moment Mr. Carr became a non-entity.

There was no hope now of his flourishing about, cheering on the dance, being the principal figure in the room. This could have been borne by every one but himself. But neither was there any hope of his being a useful, efficient ally, and all were disgusted with him. He had been allowed to nurse his spleen in obscurity until Miss La Sarte, for purposes of her own, had drawn him forth, smiled upon him, and partially restored his self-complacency.

"You are not going to dance with that lout?" said Blundell, in a low aside.

"Why not? Are you going to scold me next?"

"Should you prove as refractory. Let me rescue you," offering his arm as he spoke.

"No, indeed; how can I? You would not have me behave so ill to this poor man. We have all neglected him quite enough to-night."

"Say you would, if you could, then."

"Our dawnce, I think," said Mr. Carr, approaching, and looking at the interloper as if he feared even yet the morsel were to be snatched from his lips.

Fortune smiled upon him, however. Miss La Sarte showed no inclination to linger, and that other fellow who had been making all the running with her up to this time was now left in the lurch. So he commented, and the reflection was balm to his wounded spirit.

Blundell, however, was not so deceived—he had got his answer, though not in words.

"Pauline"—Lady Calverley seized upon her niece,—“let this be the last. Elsie is growing quite wild. I don't know what odd-come-short she has got hold of now, but she ought not to dance with any but our own people.”

"This is going to be the last, Aunt Ella."

"And do say a word to her, my dear; she heeds you more than she does me."

"What about? I think she is behaving as well as possible," said Pauline, perversely.

"My dear!"

"I do. I can't see any harm in her dancing: she has been doing it to please others the whole

evening; she has never had a thought for herself. I think she deserves praise rather than blame."

Pauline was incomprehensible, and the perturbed lady fell back upon her uncle.

"Don't you think we have had enough of this?"

"I have had enough, Mary, and I daresay you have; but I doubt we are in the minority. Look at that scapegrace!" regarding with perfect benignity Tom's windmill figure and radiant countenance. "Do you hear him?—do you hear the young jackanapes? Making a din fit to bring the place down."

"He is but a boy," apologised Tom's aunt. "He forgets himself sometimes."

"Then let him forget himself as often as he can. A man who forgets himself has good stuff in him. What is his sister about, that she leaves all the work to little Elsie? Ah! I am glad to see her standing up at last."

On the whole, Lady Calverley was ill used by her confidants.

"Well done! well done, sir!" This from the Doctor, clapping his hands loudly and with hearty approbation as Tom, panting, gasping, and using his handkerchief in a very different manner from that which had amused Punch the evening before, drew to his side.

"That *was* a reel!" cried he. "Did you see my

partner's performances? She has nearly killed me! I never saw such a woman to dance in my life! And she is the mother of a dozen children, all here to-night, and all dancing like good uns!"

"Ay, ay," said the Doctor. "I hope you will foot it as nimbly when you come to be a grandmother, Elsie."

"I hope she won't ask me to foot it with her," said Tom. "I know what would happen. I should never survive it."

"The supper is ready; will your leddyship take your place the noo, or wull ye hae them a' in first?"

"Take them in first, Davie, and we will follow when you come for us."

Accordingly, before many minutes had passed there was an obvious diminution of the crowd.

It took nearly half an hour ere the emigration was finally accomplished; but, soon after the echoes of the last footsteps had died away, the lady of the manor and her friends were summoned.

Blundell was standing by Pauline when the messenger came; Tom was kissing his aunt over her shoulder, as he enveloped her in her furs; and the Doctor was kindly trying to engage Mr. Carr in conversation, and make him feel less of an intruder into the circle. Elsie was resting on a bench at a little distance.

The wraps were now brought forward. Blundell took up his companion's, a soft, white, cloudy shawl, and drew it round her; then he looked at the little pale-blue bundle left on the seat, and hesitated.

Already their hostess was advancing on Tom's arm, and he fancied he caught a rueful glance directed to the blue shawl. He took it up, and smiled to Pauline. "I must make my peace with the little one," he said.

How she received this he could never tell; Mr. Carr had almost jumped forward, had pressed in front of him, and had led her off with an air of triumph.

The Doctor, after a momentary hesitation, had followed; there was no one left to interfere.

"I hardly know if I may venture to offer my poor services," began Elsie's cavalier, in a voice that could be, when he chose, exquisitely modulated. "Will you take this from my hand?"

A slight formal inclination, and "Thank you," was all his politeness obtained.

"You have heated yourself with all this dancing; is it safe to go out into the night air all at once? Had we not better wait a few minutes?"

"I'm not in the least afraid. The others have gone, you see."

Steadily her eye met his. He was on the wrong tack; he must try another.

"Come, then," carelessly. "But don't go and say I gave you cold. By the way, have you forgiven me yet?"

"No." Short, sharp, emphatic.

"No? Are you such an implacable person? I should never have guessed it."

"You forgot yourself altogether just now, and it is not the first time."

This was the little speech which had been carefully prepared, whilst with bland and gracious mien Miss Calverley dispensed her closing favours. If their recent disagreement were not adverted to by him, neither would she say a word; if he recalled it, this was what he should get.

Evidently it was unexpected; he looked surprised, puzzled; and they walked the whole length of the ball-room in silence.

At the door-step stood Davie, lantern in hand. "Be quick, Miss Elsie! be quick! They're waitin' on me, and I canna be wanted longer——"

"Go on before," said Blundell, authoritatively; "we will follow. Now," said he, firmly, turning round to his companion, and putting his hand upon her arm, "you will tell me what you mean."

"It is easily told. You do not treat me with the

courtesy which is my right, and which I expect from you in the future."

Likewise carefully prepared. It was plain he stood at disadvantage, having had no rehearsal.

His "That is a grave charge, Miss Calverley," was rather a lame conclusion to some moments' thought.

"It is a true one."

"May I ask how long I have lain under your displeasure?"

"Always." Terse, if not grammatical.

"Since the first day?"

"Yes; since the first day."

"And you will not state particulars?"

"No."

She moved forward, and he mechanically offered his hand to conduct her down the steps.

Still nothing more was said. It was apparent he was pondering the matter over, and her heart sank a little as she saw she had not done with him.

"Just tell me," said he, at last, as they entered the dark, old-fashioned portico. "Just give me some idea what I do that so vexes you; and I give you my word for it, that you shall never have cause to complain again."

"It is not—not anything in particular," rejoined

she, skirmishing, like a wise general, from the heights. "It is the way you always speak to me, always look at me, as if you were saying things to see how I would take them, to—to play with me. You never behaved so to Pauline."

A faint smile stole over his face; he had caught the clue.

"Miss La Sarte is some years older than you are; you must not expect to be treated exactly the same."

It was a risk, but the event justified his temerity.

"I did not expect it," said Elsie, quite humbly; "I did not expect to be treated *quite* the same. But still, if you would not make such a great difference, if you would not show it so plainly, it would—the others would—you know——" she broke off suddenly—"I am not a child now."

"Certainly not," said Blundell, gravely.

"And mamma is so vexed if people think I am younger than I am. She is quite put out with *me* when they do so; she thinks it is my fault."

"Are you sure it is not?"

"Perhaps it is," said Elsie, sorrowfully. Then she stood still in the blaze of light into which they had entered, and raised her clear eyes to his. "I must have been wrong, or you would never have said that."

He looked down on her, "Suppose we say we were both wrong."

"Yes," eagerly; "and—and, Mr. Blundell, please don't tell anybody; please" (with great anxiety) "don't tell mamma or Pauline." . . .

The next moment Tom was in front of them.

"We thought you had been locked out. I was on my way to look you up. Come inside, it is such fun. I tell Aunt Ella she ought to make a speech, and Uncle Macleay backs me up, Elsie." Then to her aside, "You should see that fool, Carr! He thinks it is his innings with Pauline now, and he is grinning and wriggling from ear to ear. What was Blundell about to let him cut in? I could not believe my eyes!"

All that followed after this must of necessity be done or said in public. Healths were drunk, songs were sung, speeches were made; and at length the last guest had departed, and the last lamp was put out.

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"I must say it, dear. I am sorry to have to reprove you, but I cannot let it pass. Your behaviour to-night did not please me at all. Here, there, everywhere; you and Tom never seemed in one place for two minutes together. It is all very

well for Tom; but for you, a young lady—I was quite shocked. So different from Pauline!”

Lady Calverley, who was one of the flighty kind herself, held her niece to be perfect, and would fain have cut her daughter to the same pattern.

“Go to bed now, and let us say no more about it; but it really will not do. We shall have to give up our harvest-dances altogether, if there is to be this romping. Just like the Miss Gregorys!”

“Oh, mamma!”

“Well, it is; I never approved of it from the first—never. But your poor, dear father—however, let us say no more about it. Your uncle was very kind; but I am sure Mr. Blundell was surprised, and I don’t wonder at it.”

A little droop of the lips, but no protest.

“Pauline behaved so well—but, indeed, she always does. So gentle, so dignified, never putting herself forward, and—how well she looked!” cried Lady Calverley, with sudden eagerness. “I am sure Mr. Blundell is struck with her.”

“Good night, mamma.”

“Good night, my love. You look pale,” observed her mother with some compunction. “I don’t say that you meant any harm, Elsie, but you must

learn that you are growing into a woman, dear, and show more womanly feeling. You know I can only desire your good. Oh, don't cry!" said the poor lady, cut to the heart to see the large eyes filling. "It was no fault, I told you that; I did not mean you to take it so. Now you make me feel as if I should not have spoken. Only wrong things are worth tears, Elsie."

Lady Calverley did not stop to reflect how seldom it is the things which are wrong which cost the bitterest tears: a foolish speech of our own, a slighting word of another's, and our pillow is wet; but where are the drops that should fall over the unkind thought, the envious pang, the jest at folly? Our hearts will ache for a prick to our vanity, our cheeks burn at the mocking of a simpleton; but does their *sin* cause us a sigh or a cry? Nay, for this we have no choking sobs, no quivering lips. To weep we need to suffer.

And thus with our little Elsie.

She sleeps, but even her dreams are haunted. She wakes, and recollection wakes with her.

They had all conspired in disapproval. Blundell had told her of one indiscretion; her mother had accused her of many. She had herself asserted that she was no longer a child, and almost imme-

diately afterwards had been charged with want of womanly feeling.

And then, cruellest of all was that comparison to Pauline. Happy Pauline! Admired as well as beloved, beautiful as well as good, what needed she more?

“And he to dare to tell me that! To hold her up as an example to me” (which he had not done), “and to say that I must not expect to be treated the same! I wish he would go away, and take her with him! I wish never to see either of their faces again! And here I must go down to them all, as if nothing had happened, and submit to be scolded and lectured by everybody! I shan’t, though—not by him. When he comes up next I shall be sitting quite cool and quiet, and be very much taken up with letters, or something. If he speaks I need not hear at first, I will make him repeat it twice; then he may go and talk to his Pauline! Tom shall keep his distance too; he thinks he can twist me round his little finger. Mamma won’t like it, I dare-say. I shall just tell her I can’t help that; I am doing my best to be like Pauline!”

A pause.

“Oh, I couldn’t say it! I could never, never say it! Oh, Pauline! dear, dear, *kind* Pauline!”

broke out a loud sobbing whisper as pride and passion fled, "I am a very wicked girl, and you are—an angel! God bless you, God bless you, dear Pauline!"

CHAPTER IX.

"THE JUANITA IS GETTING UP HER SAILS!"

"Merrily, merrily goes the bark

On a breeze from the northward free;

So shoots through the morning sky the lark—

Or the swan through the summer sea."

A PALE grey rippling sea, a warm and gentle breeze, cloudlets fleeting over the sky and forming a dimly-mottled horizon—these were the signs that the long-expected day had come at last.

About such a day there could not be the shadow of a doubt, and for a few moments the joyful anticipation it inspired, put everything else out of Elsie's head.

At length they were to realise the pleasure so long and hopelessly deferred; and afterwards, decided the ungrateful girl, the author of it might go his way, and be seen of them no more.

Pauline surely could not be deeply concerned if such were to be the case: her warning in the turret-chamber indicated that then, at all events, she was herself unaware of any feeling regarding him; and

if she were now conscious of such, she would guard her own heart, as she had offered to guard Elsie's.

As for him, it did not signify whether he were concerned or not. She only felt aggrieved that her means of ascertaining his feelings were so limited, as to put it out of her power to be absolutely certain of wounding them.

Nevertheless she hastily retracted the *rôle* prepared in the night. It would scarcely do to pretend not to hear if he were to be offering her his hospitality; and to accept, and be rude in the act, would be impossible.

In less than two minutes she had resolved to lose sight of all disagreeable reminiscences, and enjoy herself to the utmost.

"Pauline, Pauline, the Juanita is getting up her sails!"

"I was a fool about that child last night," was the conviction brought home to Blundell's mind the instant he saw Elsie. "Here have I been fretting over my cursed vanity, and her little sad face—— and come up to find her as pert as a humming-bird!"

"Miss La Sarte," began he, "is this to be the day?"

"My aunt will be here in a few minutes. She has only gone into the next room." Miss La Sarte

politely waived the question. He sat down beside her.

"None of you are the worse for your exertions?"

"No, thank you."

"Nor any colds?"

"No."

"And the weather is perfect. Dr. Macleay, I am hoping to induce you all to come for a sail."

"I shall have to sail, but I am afraid not with you, Mr. Blundell. I must sail away to my own people."

"Let me—let us all convoy you."

"No, no, my good sir, I know what that means. It is very tempting, but I must not take another lazy day."

"What do I hear?" Lady Calverley had caught the last words as she entered. "Talking of running away, already! And I understood you were to be with us on Sunday?"

"If Mr. Sinclair cannot get any one else, I shall have to come over again, or send my missionary——"

"Oh, come yourself. Come yourself, please."

"Come yourself," echoed Elsie.

"Well, well, it must be that, must it? And to speak the truth, there is a presbytery meeting at the

Point on Monday, which I should have to attend at any rate. So I must be off early to-day, if I am to be back again so soon."

"And when are we to start?" said Blundell, addressing his hostess.

"Do you really mean us to go?"

"I hope you really mean to go."

It was plain she was to go, whether she meant it or not.

"Don't wait for me," cried the Doctor, perceiving he might be in the way. "The sooner I am off the better. And," giving her a hint, "I daresay Mr. Blundell's boat is waiting."

"*That* does not signify a bit. I only wish we might have you with us," replied Blundell, courteously.

"You are very good; I wish it too, with all my heart. But work must be done, and I have a funeral at twelve. Yes, my dear, the dog-cart if you please. Mr. Blundell, suppose you walk off with me while the ladies are putting on their things, and they can join you at the boat? The dog-cart will overtake us."

Every one looked grateful for a proposal so well timed, and he took his leave amid general goodwill.

"What a trump he is!" cried Tom, enthusi-

astically. "And what a jolly day we are going to have!"

"Now for the lilac hat, Pauline," whispered Elsie.

"The white one will do after all, Elsie, and be more shade from the sun."

"It is not nearly so becoming."

"Is it not? Oh, that is no matter." And Pauline turned softly away.

"She thinks he will see her often enough in it afterwards," considered Elsie; "and certainly it does not signify what she puts on—he will admire her all the same."

"Come along! Come along! Come along!" Tom beat a tattoo at all the doors in turn. "Come along, Aunt Ella; you won't like to be hurried on the way, you know. Come along, Pauline; Blundell will be tired of waiting. Come along, Elsie; are you putting twenty hats on your head at once?" adapting the spur to each with artful nicety.

Pauline in her white hat and frock, with a shawl hung over her arm, came out at his summons, but Elsie refused any recognition of it.

Her door was barred, and she was changing for the third time from one dress to the other.

Originally she had intended wearing a delicate

pea-green French cambric, which of course suited her charmingly.

It was a simple thing enough, but so pretty in its glossy freshness, that she hesitated to doom it to the wash-tub—an inevitable result of the expedition.

On the other hand, the *piqué*, which was her only alternative, ought to have been in the wash-tub already.

Oh for a white serge like Pauline's!

As she peeped out of her window, and nodded to her cousin on the lawn, protesting that she would be down in something under half a second—whilst she had, in fact, not even begun operations in earnest—this desire took possession of her mind.

A white serge! It seemed to have been manufactured for the occasion.

After that vision, the *piqué* became intolerable. Off with it! On with the other! A bunch of dark sweet-peas in her bosom, and she is ready.

Nor had the elder lady been without her perplexities.

An old good gown, or a new middling gown? A warm gown, or a cool gown? A long gown that would be dreadfully in the way, or a short one that would perhaps be—well, hardly in the way enough?

She too had a glimpse of her niece standing in the sunshine outside.

At the moment, Tom was inserting a red rose in his sister's white straw hat, to match the crimson shawl on her arm; and her simple robe, without a frill or flounce, without a ruffle to break its surface, fell in soft folds over the grass. Pauline was stooping forward, as Tom, with excellent taste, arranged the rose.

"A perfect picture!" exclaimed the aunt; "and how exactly alike they are!"

Lady Calverley was not quick in discernment. She saw the same brown hair (which curled for Tom) and the long brown lashes (which did the like for his sister), the same curve of the chin, and the same short upper lip, and said, "How like they are!"

A slight action of the hand when speaking, and a trick of lifting the head, and throwing it backwards when under the influence of any emotion, was also shared by both, and in allusion to this Lady Calverley added, "And in all their ways, too!"

Then she too decided on the gown which she had *not* meant to wear; for, good woman as she was, she did not like to be thrust altogether into the shade.

"What are those two about?" muttered Tom. "What in the world had they to do, but put on their boots? Can't you manage to rout them out, Pauline? You have been ready for nearly half an hour."

"Am I properly dressed, Tom?"

"Yes, you are all right; but the rose was the finishing touch. I have got this white one for Elsie. What a roaster of a day it is going to be! Aunt Ella! I say, Aunt Ella! You won't need to put on your fur boa!!! Oh, here comes Miss Elsie at last, and as demure as possible! Here, mademoiselle, I have got this white rose for you."

"Thank you, Tom, but give it to Pauline. She is in white, you see, as it is."

"And you *don't* see how beautifully I have carried out the idea?" pointing to the rose and shawl. "White against white would be poor, it is the red that touches it up. She would never have thought of that for herself. *I* saw it in a moment."

"Then what do you think of this mixture?" said Pauline, divining her cousin's feelings. "These rich dark hues against the pale green? They are lovely, Elsie dear. You look very sweet," said she, with a strange little thrill in her voice.

"Not bad," said Tom, twirling his rose silently in his fingers, and waiting to see if it would be asked for.

Another minute, and he felt sure it would; but, "My dear Tom, is that for me?" from his aunt, naturally put an end to the matter.

Blundell was waiting for them at the boat.

The tide was tolerably high, and they embarked without any occurrence worthy of note.

The usual exclamations of novices on their first admittance on board a yacht,—the usual wonder at the snowy whiteness of the boards, and at the comforts and luxuries of the cabins—together with the usual unexpressed commentaries on their smallness and narrowness,—were duly gone through.

They were taken to see everything above and below, the compass, the kitchen, the chickens roasting for luncheon; and finally, seats were arranged in a comfortable place, and they sat in a group, all together, maintaining that easy dropping chit-chat which people readily fall into, whose tastes and feelings are in common, when they have been inmates of one dwelling for any length of time.

If Blundell had not been an inmate of the Castle, they had seen scarcely less of him during the past ten days than if he had been.

When topics failed, exclamations on the beauty

of the scene, the excellence of the day, and the delights of sailing, filled up the intervening spaces.

Presently, however, there was a move.

Pauline wished to pencil the outlines of the broken mountain-range which they were passing on the northern side, and Blundell was confident that he could find her a more convenient seat for the purpose.

Over a long low bench (it might have been a spare mast, and probably was) he spread a rug, and the tiny skylight of the cabin gave a support to her back.

Could she be comfortable there?

Perfectly, and she confessed he was in the right—she could now sketch at her leisure.

But to do so she was obliged to furl her parasol, and the glare of the sun was such, that he could do no other than offer to hold it over her.

This she could not allow; she had no need of it—her hat was sufficient protection—it was only a trouble.

“You will break this, as you broke the other,” said he, “unless I am allowed to keep it out of the way.”

She would not break it—she would permit him to put it anywhere he liked, but he must not sacrifice himself.

So persistent was she that he grew irritated. "Pray let me have my own way for once." ("I am not *going* to make love to you, so you need not be so dead set against it," flashed through his mind.)

After this Miss La Sarte gave in.

"I am afraid," said Blundell presently, after a pause, in which he had had time to grow ashamed of himself, "that you must think me a very quarrelsome fellow. I never was sweet-tempered, but I have been worse than ever lately. Miss La Sarte, do you know what it is to be so out of conceit of yourself as to take amiss everything said to you?"

"Is that your feeling?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Irritation of the nervous system, probably."

"How prosaic! But I daresay you are right."

Then there was another pause, and a burst of merriment came across the deck from the other party.

"They are more talkative than we are," said Blundell.

"I never talk when I am drawing."

"You are making a very pretty little sketch, but is that peak high enough?"

"It is quite high enough—I measured it with

my pencil; but until it is shaded you cannot judge of it correctly. It looks too near at hand, in this outline."

This was all. These short spasmodic sentences, with absolutely nothing in them.

Supposing him to have been a lover, this was his opportunity.

The others were close at hand, it was true, but they were out of sight and out of hearing.

Here was abundance of leisure, close proximity, and everything favourable.

Yet his reserve was matched by hers, and if he was absent, so was she.

Towards mid-day the breeze increased.

"Isn't it jolly?" said Tom, coming round. "Could anything be more splendid? This baking sun and that swish of the waves against her sides! But, I say," wagging his head, with a sly look, "somebody over there is beginning to feel the motion."

CHAPTER X.

"GOOD NIGHT, *DEAR!*"

"Each puny wave in diamonds rolled,
O'er the calm deep, where hues of gold
With azure strove, and green;
The wind breathed soft as lover's sigh,
And oft renewed, seemed oft to die,
With breathless pause between."

"If they would only have had luncheon, when it began to be rough! I know I could have stood it as well as any one! It was only being so hungry and so empty, and the sight of those chickens as they passed! Oh, Pauline! how can you look so fresh? Don't you feel it, in the least?"

Poor Elsie lay on a sofa in the inner cabin, and hours had passed since she left the deck.

"I think if you had not gone below so soon," suggested her cousin; "if you would have waited, and had some brandy-and-water, and a little hard biscuit, as Mr. Blundell suggested, you would have been better."

"How could I? It was too late then. He never came near me till just at the end, when I could wait up no longer."

"He did not think of it till Tom came round and told us. We heard you laughing only a few minutes before."

"I thought I could manage to hold out, but Tom would make me look at things. It was that, and having to speak to him, and to say I was enjoying myself, just at the very worst moment—just when we got round the corner into the open sea—that made me know how wretched I was. If he had let me alone——"

"Never mind now, dear; I am going to sit with you a little."

"Oh no, you are not."

Pauline sat down.

"You are going to do nothing of the kind," cried Elsie, raising herself on her elbow. "I told mamma I would not have her either. Because I can't enjoy it, do you think I am going to let you lose it all? Go away, and be as happy as ever you can; but don't let anybody come near me. Now mind you don't," beseechingly.

"Mr. Blundell," said Pauline, in a low voice, "was very anxious to come down and carry you up to the deck."

"The idea of such a thing! How could he think of it?"

Pauline smiled a grave smile, and put her cool hand on the girl's brow.

"Ah! how nice!" exclaimed Elsie. "My head does burn so! But, Paulie dear, I really don't want you here. I can't talk to you if you stay, and it would make me worse to have you. So just go away, but—give me a kiss, first."

.

"It is delightful, Mr. Blundell! I enjoy it thoroughly; but my poor little daughter——"

"I wish we could get in a little sooner, for her sake. But the wind has chopped round to another quarter, and you see it is dying down besides. I am afraid it must be another hour, at the shortest, before we shall be there, Lady Calverley."

Even so it proved. The breeze sank away to a whisper. The waves subsided, and the *Juanita* made almost imperceptible progress.

"Surely your cousin will venture up now?" said Blundell to Tom.

"I'll go and see."

"No, Tom, let me go." Pauline had risen. "I will bring her up, if it is possible."

It proved to be impossible. She was unwillingly supported into the saloon; but there she begged to be left, and only sent for, when they were going to

land. The pretty green dress was crumpled beyond recovery, and her sweet-peas strewed the floor.

Her cousin would again have stayed, but Elsie was peremptory. She would neither condemn Pauline to the little close cabin, nor afford a pretext for any of the others to offer their company.

Pauline was to say that it was her special wish to be alone; and this message Pauline delivered so completely in the spirit in which it was given, that it was impossible even for Tom to do more than shout down the cabin-stairs from time to time, "Any better, Elsie? We are close at home now."

How close they were she could not judge; but the cheerful tidings were announced more than once before a stir overhead, a rattling of ropes, and a general movement, proclaimed that something new was going on.

A few seconds after, steps were heard on the cabin-stair; then a stoppage, and an order was given, by which she knew who the intruder was.

"He is coming to fetch me now," thought Elsie. "I wish it had been any one else. And this is the day I have been looking forward to so much; this the end of my beautiful sunny morning! I never, never will set my heart upon anything again!"

"You have had a sad time of it, I am afraid." Blundell's voice came in at the door. "We are op-

posite Gourloch now, and the ladies are waiting to disembark. May I come in?"

Elsie raised herself languidly, and tried to smile. She felt weak, and wearied, but no longer giddy, and was able to stand without assistance. "I suppose it is quite calm now?" she said.

"Like a mill-pond. Scarcely a breath to keep us going," picking up her hat from the floor as he spoke. "Your cousin is a rare good sailor; she has been quite enjoying it."

"And so has mamma."

"Yes, I don't think Lady Calverley has been the least uneasy. What a pity the sea does not suit you! Headache?" said he, kindly, seeing she put her hand to her forehead.

"It is nothing, thank you; it will go off in the fresh air. What a fright I look!" cried Elsie, involuntarily, as, hat in hand, she turned to the mirror.

He laughed, "That was so like you."

Burning as they were already, her cheeks blushed a deeper crimson. "Ought I not to have said it?"

"No."

"I am ready," said she, quietly.

"You won't ask me why you ought not? It was because it was not true."

"Oh!" A little smile. "But I am sure it *is* true," said she, after a minute. "My hair is all

coming down, and my face is so hot——never mind; let us come up-stairs.”

“Let me cloak you up first. Coming out of the cabin, though it is such a warm night, you might catch cold.”

She allowed him to put on her shawl, and waited patiently while he bungled with the pin. He was awkward, or preoccupied. Which was it? At all events, the operation took up several minutes’ time.

“Now I am ready,” said Elsie, once more; on which he silently took her hand, and she suffered herself to be led up-stairs.

No one was near the spot when the two emerged. Blundell looked round, and stood still irresolutely, took a few paces forward, again stopped, and bent down towards her. “I am so sorry you are going,” he said. “Good night, good night, *dear!*”

Little word to undo it all! Elsie neither spoke nor moved, but stood still, and let him see it all in her face.

“Wait here one moment,” said he, hurriedly. “The boat is lowered, and the men——”

“Oh,” said Tom, coming to meet him half-way across the deck; “you were so long in coming that your fellows grew impatient. They said every moment was precious when the tide was at this point

for the landing, and my aunt was growing fidgety, so I took it upon me to let them go. She can't get over the rocks, you know. It won't matter for Elsie."

"All right," replied his friend, with indifference. (So that was what kept you quiet, was it?)

"Tom has sent off the boat," he announced, aloud. "He was quite right. It will be difficult, as it is, for Lady Calverley to land comfortably; but Tom declares he can easily help *you* over the rocks."

"I can help myself," muttered the girl. "I don't need him."

"Yes, you will, and me too, I suspect. Suppose I come too?" he added, bending forward to look into her face.

"I could not think of troubling you," said Elsie, gently.

"Is it a trouble? What do you think? Come, sit down here where your cousin has had her seat all day. Why, you are shivering, child, and the night is quite hot! Are you chilly?" said he, touching her hand.

A faint "No."

"I know what it is; you have eaten nothing to-day. Suleiman, a cup of coffee here, as soon as you can, and make it strong. Bring some bread or cake too."

"Oh no, I—I really could not touch it," said Elsie, as the man departed. "I wish you had not sent him. I am not in the least hungry. And besides, there is no time."

"Quite enough time. Do you see what Tom is doing? He is a cunning fellow; he has got round old Blake, and taken the wheel."

"But what is he doing?"

"Giving us a turn out. We shan't be quite so near the land when the boat comes back."

"But what is he doing that for?"

"I suppose he thinks," said her companion, sitting down by her side as he spoke, and watching the effect of his words, "that he would not object to having a few more of those rocks uncovered!"

"It is very presuming of him!" cried she, flushing up, as his meaning became apparent to her. "What right has he to interfere?"

"Don't be angry with Tom," said Blundell. "I am not."

"He may do all sorts of mischief."

"He may——if you are bad to him."

("He treats me like a child," sobbed the poor little girl in her heart. "He thinks Tom and I are fond of each other, and it amuses him. Oh, how cruel it all is!")

"Why are you crying?" said a low voice in her ear.

"I am *not*!" With a sharp ring in her "*not*," and two brimming wide-open eyes, Elsie turned, and defied him.

"Did you want so very much to get ashore?"

"Yes, very much. I am tired, and—oh, I beg your pardon, I did not mean to be rude," the bold beginning suddenly faded into a whisper. "Please do not mind. Please go away."

"Must I go away? You will have no one to talk to, if I do, and I am very happy here," said Blundell, dallying with his happiness, as a man will do who feels that he holds his fate in his own hands. "Why should I go away?"

She saw her mistake.

"Why should I go away?" reiterated he.

Still no reply.

"Let me give you your coffee first. You don't take sugar, I know. You will thank me, or rather Suleiman, when you have tasted it; he is one of the few gifted individuals who really can make coffee. Now, is that not good? I thought so, and you will be the better for it too. Good coffee is one of the best restoratives in the world. Any more? Quite sure? And now, tell me, for I want to know, *why should I go away?*"

She had thought to get off.

The easy transition to the tones of a polite host, the allusion to her tastes, the little word of praise to his servant, had completely deceived her.

How strange that he should persist in teasing! Why should he seek to amuse himself with her, just because he could not get Pauline? It was neither right nor kind of him; it was wrong, very wrong. And yet he had called her "*dear*."

She was stupefied, dumb, unfit to contest in so close a combat.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry!" Tom's voice was startling in its suddenness. "But I'm afraid I have taken you out rather further than I meant to do. Blake and I fell to talking, and he was spinning some long yarn or other: I don't know how it came about, but we have put her out instead of in."

"You must take us back again, old fellow, that's all."

Tom looked about him for a seat.

"You can't leave the skipper, now that you have got him into the scrape," continued Blundell. "You must stay and chat with the old boy, or you will have him quite savage. He is looking after you now with the tail of his eye."

Tom hesitated, and looked down upon the pair.

His cousin, sitting forward, her cheek resting on her hand, took no heed of him. Her eyes were fixed on the golden sea-line, on the purple bank of clouds above, and on the little fleet of herring-boats, whose brown sails showed darkly against the sky. She was absent, absorbed; musing doubtless on the beauty of the scene, drinking in the sweet warm air of the summer night. Blundell, lying by her side, was no nearer to her in such contemplations than he at the other end of the deck; and what a walk home he and Elsie would have!

No one pressed his departure, but the look of indolent expectation in Blundell's eyes was more difficult to withstand than words. He went, and left the two still silent.

"Well?" said the man, at last.

"Well, what?" murmured the girl.

"I have not had an answer to my question yet."

"You are only joking. What does it matter? Look, do you see those little vessels on the horizon? They are on their way north, for the herring have gone from here. I heard some fishermen say so yesterday. It is curious, is it not, that they should come and go, in that way, no one knowing why, or able even to guess?"

"Very. Yes. Elsie, I am going to tell you something."

So then, it had come at last!

He was going to tell her now, to confide in her, doubtless because he could not keep it to himself any longer. She had felt how it would be, how it must be from the very first; yet to tell it to *her*—that *she* should be the recipient of his love-tale, when the love was for another, struck her poor sick heart, a new jealous blow. Could she let him go on? could she encourage the recital?

Ah, she must—she must.

But a few words would be sufficient—one word, a monosyllable; and in the end a little quavering "Yes" struggled across her lips.

"You send me away from you," began the narrator, in a deep undertone, "and you will give me no reason why I should go. Now I am going to show you the best of reasons why I should not. Elsie, do you know that I have seen to-day some one whom I can never forget? some one who steals my thoughts by day, and breaks in upon my dreams at night? Do you know that I am a dull fellow, always looking on the black side of things, and that I am haunted by that little merry laugh, those saucy eyes? What do you say? Do you think you know—you do, you

must have guessed, at least, who it is that I mean? Tell me then, have you not?"

A sinking head, a heaving bosom confessed its "Yes," a guilty whisper tried to reach him "No."

"Haven't you? And I am just going to ask her——"

"Aha, Ralph! old boy! Run you to earth at last!"

CHAPTER XI.

"AHA, RALPH! RUN YOU TO EARTH AT LAST!"

"Bad men are seldom cheerful, but we see,
That when successful they can merry be."

CRABBE.

THE person from whom this salutation proceeded was a tall young man, with fair hair, a clean-shaven cheek, and a lint-white moustache falling straight down from the upper lip, in the narrowest possible arch.

Simultaneously with his "Aha, Ralph!" another voice said, playfully, and with a slightly foreign accent, "How do you do, Blondell?"

This speaker was a short man, with an ugly, clever, meditative face; a face from which you might gather that he to whom it belonged could, in the common phrase, do anything he chose, and also that what he chose to do would not always bear investigation.

The countenances of both gentlemen wore a cheerful expression, denoting that they had come, not because they expected their arrival would be

welcome, but because they were morally sure it would not,—a conviction which, when it is to the taste of the individuals concerned, imparts a delightfully piquant flavour to the otherwise commonplace event.

The look of amazement deepening into disgust upon Blundell's face, the broken ejaculation which escaped his lips, were compensation for all they had undergone to find him,—and apparently it was not a little.

"We hear of you at Oban," said the little man. "We hear you are in this diztrick. To-day we are at Staffa, at Iona, and we see you with our own eyes. We see your yacht, your beautiful sails, your charming company on board—we see all this so nise, and so—what you call it?—tantalising? is that it, the word? We see——"

"How on earth did you see all this?" broke out Blundell, staring from one to the other.

"Do I not tell you? We are in that steamboat which did pass you, two—three hours ago. Oh, we have glasses, and we see it all! But we come not at you. The captain, he is a brute, he will not put us off. So then, we must go back with him, and get out when we toch—what is the name?" turning to his companion.

"Oh, shut up!" replied the other. "Ralph, old

chap," looking towards Elsie, who had risen and drawn back on their approach, "we did not expect to find the company still here; you will hardly have room to lodge us if you have a party."

"Miss Calverley is going ashore in the boat that brought you here;—at least I presume you came in my boat?"

"Oh yes, certain," resumed the little man. "We see the boat from the shore; we think they fish, and they come when we call. We cry 'Halloo! Halloo!'—"

"I say, aren't you glad to see us?" interrupted the other, with an expressive smile. "Try to say so, if you can, just for civility's sake, you know."

"Shot if I am!" retorted Blundell, the first gleam of good-humour appearing in his face. "We are not victualled for cannibals. But"—lower—"wait till I see them off. Here, Tom! you remember Chaworth? Now, look sharp, or you won't get over the rocks to-night! Now, Miss Calverley."

"Thank him for the sail, quick!" exhorted Tom, as Elsie in silence took her seat in the boat.

Then looking up, as they let go, he called out, cheerily, "You'll all come up to-morrow,—won't you?"

"Who are they, Tom?" asked his cousin, as soon as they were out of hearing.

"That tall one with the moustache was Chaworth. You have heard me talk of him before. I don't know who the other was. How queer of Blundell not to tell us he was expecting them to-night!"

"Perhaps they came before they were due," said Elsie, who had good reason for the supposition. "How much pleasanter it is to-night than it has been all day! Listen to the corncrakes!"

Going home, she took his arm; she even asked for it. "Tom, I am still giddy—I can't walk properly; let me take hold of you."

Poor Tom! As she said it, there came wafted towards them the bitter scent of the bog-myrtle bruised beneath their feet; and all his life afterwards he remembered that perfume.

For some minutes after the boat left, there was silence on the Juanita's deck. It was broken by the German, saying softly to himself, with a series of running nods towards the retreating figures—

"Yes, yes; that is ve-rie nise."

"Rather a mistake—wasn't it?" said Chaworth, in his hearty way. "Awfully sorry, you know. We shouldn't have done it upon any account, if we had had the slightest idea; should we, Heinsicht? Don't bear malice, old fellow."

A face of wood could not have remained more immovable than did that of the man under scrutiny.

Adroit evasion, as much as sharp repartee, would have been useless. The face said, "You know so much, which I can't help; but just find out some more, will you?"

"And what am I to do with you, since you are here?" said Blundell, at last, beginning to recover. "Where are your traps?"

"At Oban; at the big place there. We have only come down upon you for the night. We shan't trouble you further."

Chaworth stroked his moustache ceremoniously as he spoke, and slightly drew himself up. It was enough. The arrow found its mark.

"*Trouble* me?" said his friend, quite kindly. "Don't be a fool, Jack."

Thus conquered, Blundell became at once the docile and attentive host.

In person he bustled over the arrangement of their quarters, and the preparations for their entertainment; as much, it seemed, in atonement for his previous want of hospitality, as in excuse for it.

It was but a bit of a place, he hoped they would be comfortable, but it was their own doing, &c., &c. But it ended with this: whatever he had they were welcome to share.

The other two, for their part, spared no pains to maintain the goodwill at length excited.

They ate vigorously, drank with moderation, and on Blundell's excusing himself from joining them on deck afterwards, on the plea that he had given up smoking, and had letters to write, appeared to be not only sensible of the evil effects of cigars, but to be on the point of giving them up themselves.

The letters to be written resolved themselves into one short note; and in two minutes he had dashed off the first page.

"MY DEAR LADY CALVERLEY,—The friends for whom I have been waiting so long, having at length made their appearance——"

Here he stopped to blot, before turning the leaf; and on reading over what he had written, in order to catch up the thread on the other side, suddenly tore the sheet in pieces. "No; hang it! I won't go, throwing a lie behind me!"

Second note—

"MY DEAR LADY CALVERLEY,—My friends who arrived unexpectedly last night are anxious to be off early to-morrow morning, so——"

"Why, this is as bad as the other! What *am* I to say? A fellow must make some excuse."

The few bald lines which finally found their way to the breakfast-table at Gourloch ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR LADY CALVERLEY,—Tom will have told you of the arrival of my friends last night. We are taking advantage of the fair breeze to be off early to-morrow, so I am afraid I shall not be able to call and thank you for all your kind hospitality. Should we pass here on our way south, I hope to find you still at Gourloch.—With kind remembrances to all your circle, believe me yours truly,

“R. BLUNDELL.”

“When did this come?” inquired the lady to whom it was addressed, as she lifted it from her plate.

“It was handed into the ludge a while ago, my leddy,” replied Davie, hovering about to hear if anything particular were contained in the epistle. Lady Calverley looked at the envelope with curious indecision, and after several minutes’ delay, inquired, absently—

“This morning?”

“This mornin’ or last night—naebody said.”

“What does he say?” cried Tom, impatiently.

Elsie, in startled silence, thought she knew. Pauline *did* know.

From her lattice window she had seen the white sails hoisted as the dawn was breaking—had seen the vessel glide swiftly past over a grey sea, whose waves were washing the rocks—had seen it become a mere speck upon the water, then turn a point and vanish; and an hour after, there still knelt in the same place a motionless figure, whose face was turned upwards.

"What does he say, Aunt Ella?" demanded Tom for the second time.

"Oh, read it for yourself, my dear," replied she, finding it easier to give this answer than any other, and beginning to play nervously with her cups and saucers as she spoke. "There is very little in it."

Tom seized the note.

"It cannot be *that*, then," thought Elsie; and Pauline troubled herself very little as to what it was. She could guess.

"Cool, that!" said Tom, and read it a second time with the provoking slowness common to his sex.

Then he endorsed the idea. "I call that uncommonly cool!"

No message to him! No notice of his invitation! No pretext for departure so sudden! Such conduct merited but one epithet—it was "cool."

Just as if they were not good enough for his friends! No doubt the other fellow was some swell;

but Chaworth—Chaworth had always been as jolly to him as possible; and, in fact, he had been forecasting to Elsie on their walk home the fun they would all have together.

It was a sad home-thrust to the self-complacency of early manhood, and Tom, in his vexation, thought not of the feelings of others. This was well.

The colour which flooded and then fled from Elsie's cheek, the dilation of her eye, and the broken murmur which fell from her lips, were unmarked by any but Pauline.

Lady Calverley gave her whole attention to the tea-tray, making a hasty assault on the cups. Her niece was dear to her as a daughter, and with all the nobility of love, she would not look upon her in what might prove a moment to be forgotten.

The cream and sugar were put in all wrong; but with an easy air she dispensed her cups, nor took heed whether the slim fingers on her right hand trembled when stretched out, or no. Nor will we.

But Pauline, apart from her own feelings, was sorely troubled about her little cousin.

After the first shock, which had nearly discovered the state of her heart to all present, Elsie's pride rallied, and bore her up.

She went through her duties punctiliously, omitted nothing, neglected nothing, and was so gentle and

considerate towards Tom, that he instinctively felt there was something wrong.

"What is the matter with Elsie, Pauline? Is she not well?"

"She has a headache to-day, I know," replied his sister.

"So have I. There is 'fire in the air,' as Alister says. I wish it would come here and clear away those yellow clouds. Elsie," as she entered, "I'll tell you what you'll do for your headache. Come out and sit under the sycamore, and"—great effort of the mind—"I'll read to you."

"May I come too?" said Pauline, afraid that the scheme would end in disappointment—Elsie being inattentive, Tom chagrined.

The disappointment, however, was of another kind. Elsie, too anxious to please, missed the mark. She liked it very much *indeed*—would like to have more, and then—made some excuse to slip away.

"There *is* something wrong about her," said Tom. "I say, look here——" turning his head aside, and looking at the sea. "Is she—thinking—about *him*?"

Now for it, Pauline!

How can she shelter Elsie, comfort Tom, speak the truth, and reveal nothing? She hesitated, casting about in her mind for some way out of the slough of perplexity.

"She is, then?" said Tom.

His husky voice spoke volumes.

"Tom," said she, with her arm round his neck, and her cheek laid on his curls, "never mind her now. She is so young, and she has never seen anybody. Don't think any more about it. But be to her just as you used to be, and don't—try to—to please her *too* much."

"Have I done that?" said he, lifting his head, amazed.

"I think so, sometimes. Let her alone now. She will care for you some day."

"Are you a prophet, Pauline?"

"Yes, I am going to be a prophet for you."

"What a shame it was!" broke out Tom, after a long silence. "He was always making up to *you*——" He stopped short.

The arm round his neck pressed it a little tighter, but nothing was said.

"I say, he isn't worth caring twopence about."

"Never mind him, dear."

"You have been awfully good," continued Tom, brokenly. "I didn't know—I never thought—somehow I forgot you. But you are not bothering after him, are you?"

She had borne much, but this from Tom—from her rough-and-ready jocund brother—was the soft

sun-touch upon ice, and her lip began to quiver like an infant's ere it cries.

Tom looked hastily round, and rose with a sense of awe.

He had never kissed his sister spontaneously in his life; but now, as he passed, he rubbed something into her face, and though it was only his ear and a portion of his cheek, she understood.

Then he went off by himself, whilst she remained behind, for each was best alone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROCESS.

"I watch him well—his wayward course
Shows off a tincture of remorse."

SCOTT.

A SILENT sea, a becalmed vessel, and two men lying on its deck smoking.

"I have not yet made up my mind," said Heinsicht.

Blundell.—"You mean to make it up before you die, I suppose?"

"I suppose, yes."

"Otherwise you will have to make it up pretty sharp afterwards."

"Bah! there is no creed in heaven."

"Don't trouble yourself as to what there is in heaven, my friend,—*you* won't be there."

"*Teufel!* What you mean?" exclaimed the German, angrily.

"That's about it. Ask him. He'll tell you. Do you imagine he means to let you off after you have had all your share of the bargain? Nothing of the

sort. All you have to do is to go on the way you're going, and you will walk to the devil as straight as any fellow ever did in this world."

"You English!" broke out the German, passionately. "That is so like you, with your cold-hearted, steeff, supercilioss speech! You have no minds, no—no perception; you are as hard and dry as these boards. *This* is right, and *that* is wrong; and this you must do, or you must not do. You always want to dominate. It is a crime, a—a wickedness to think for one's self. In Germany we say, I go my way, you go yours; both are good; we will meet at the end. Here it is, if you go not my way you go to the devil. I hate this narrow, this *thin* talk. It is only for a woman, who will do what her priest tells her. I would not make my life like yours for great worlds. I would sooner be dead."

"I did not mean to offend you, Heinsicht; we are both saying what we think, you know."

"You do *not* think, that is it. You are saying what is told you; what you think you *most* say. And why? Because you have been ill; you have had the—what is it?—the nightmare. You will get better; you will shake it off. Who would be frightened into believing what his reason reffuses? That is childish."

"I believe you are right. My reason has certainly not had much voice in the matter."

"Why," continued Heinsicht, pursuing his advantage. "Listen to this. Look upon me. In Germany I am a very good Lutheran; in Italy I am a Catholic; here I am anything. I meet with very good people, very *nise* people, everywhere. I enjoy my life. I take all that is good, and trouble myself not more. But you, you are sombre, *misanthrope*, miserable. You take no wine, no beer; you go to no little parties; you have no books, no pictures, and you make yourself as unheppy as you can. You tell me I am to go to the devil. I say, you have gone to the devil already."

"Humph!" said Blundell, thoughtfully. After a pause, he added, "Heinsicht, did you ever see a man die?"

"If I had not," replied his companion, "that would be a strange thing. Seen it? Yes. Once, twice, hondreds of times."

"In the war, I suppose; but I mean in cold blood."

"Yes, I tell you, yes. What then?"

"When your own turn might be the next?"

"And this," said Heinsicht, with immeasurable contempt—"this is what a man comes to when he is aff—raid! This is what has taken the life—the—

the ghost out of a man thirty years of age! He has had one little sight of danger, and he runs away from all his friends——”

“Confound you!”

“Ah! take care. You most not say the naughty words. They are bad, ve-rie bad. You most take care, such care, for you have your salvation to accomplish. Are you sure now, quite sure, Blondell, that the little smoke, the cigar, does not make all wrong? You had given it up a month ago, you know.”

“What has that fool been jabbering about now?” inquired Chaworth, with a glance at his friend’s face, as he met him turning away. “He grows to be a nuisance.”

“I am the fool to let him jabber.”

“Are you going below?”

“Yes.”

“You have been at it again,” said Chaworth, seating himself in the vacant place, with a look of displeasure; “you know the sort of temper he has, and you haven’t the sense to let him alone. What is the use of going about making yourself disagreeable?”

The German smiled.

“It’s so confoundedly unpleasant to be always having you two fighting,” continued Chaworth. “If

there's one thing I hate, it is to be with fellows who are always putting each other's backs up."

"I say nothing. It is not my fault."

"You have the most infernal way of saying nothing that ever man had. What is it about now?"

"Oh, we talk," said Heinsicht, complacently; "we talk, and compare. I give him a little of what you call chaff, and he does not like it. He is difficult to please. But listen"—here he puffed out a long slow stream of vapour before proceeding—"listen, Chaworth; it is all to the good. To-day he is angry, to-morrow he is sorry; again he is angry, and again sorry. Through it all the words remain. He is coming to himself."

As usual, the quarrel was patched up, and the three continued together, cruising among the northern islands of the west coast, until the latter end of October, when a long spell of bad weather made them begin to weary of the monotony of their life.

"Jack," said Blundell, one day, when he and his old friend were by themselves; "what do you suppose those people at Gourloch think of me?"

"It is difficult to divine people's thoughts," replied Jack; "I never can be sure of my own."

"It was very bad, you know."

"I can quite believe it."

"It was the oddest thing your turning up just

when you did. Five minutes later and I stood committed. Poor little thing! She was an uncommonly pretty girl, I can tell you."

"You are not quite come to matrimony yet, old fellow. But, however, if you had cared in the least about it, you could hardly have done better. A Scotch moor for the autumn months would not be a bad thing—not by any means," cocking his head sagaciously upon one side. "If you think of it, we could call on our way back. You left that open, you remember."

"What should you say," replied Blundell, with rather a foolish smile, "if it proved to be the other one I went back to see?"

"I should say," replied Jack, coolly, "that it was very like you."

"Like me! How?"

"Knocking down your own schemes is an amusement you have been addicted to all your life."

"There was no scheme in the matter. It was simply this—they came in my way, and I had nothing else to do. Going about by one's self without a soul to speak to——"

"Your own fault, all the same," observed his friend.

"Well," assented Blundell, "you know how it was."

"I say," he broke out, after a pause, "you have not been talking about it to Heinsicht, have you?"

"Who—I? I talk to a beastly German! I say, let us get rid of him. He had too much again last night."

"What did you bring him down upon us for? I never could endure the brute."

"Neither could I." Chaworth knocked the ashes off his cigar. "Let's kick him overboard."

"I'll tell you what, Jack. We'll leave the yacht to find her own way back to Southampton, and you and I will be off to Paris."

"Done with you. And what about *der Deutsche*?"

"You ship him; I can't. Make up some excuse, and you and I will have our things packed, and be off to-morrow."

Accordingly, Blundell was arranging his papers in the saloon, with an open portmanteau by his side, when, "Yaha! yahoo! I thought it was a toad!" — came from the inner cabin; and Jack, dancing out upon bare toes, dangled into his face a soft shapeless mass, which he held suspended, apparently by the legs.

"What on earth have you got there?"

"Here, take it!" cried the apparition.

"Get out!" responded the other, drawing back, hastily. "What is it?"

It was a dead rose — a rose which, from pressure and want of air, had not shrivelled up, but was a sodden, discoloured pulp.

"What is it, then?" said Heinsicht, inquisitively, the noise having drawn him from his retreat. As he spoke he stretched forward a nose, which was ugly with the obtrusive, aggressive ugliness which Germany alone is capable of producing. A nose which had swept outward with a rush, and hesitated, before deciding upon the upward movement which it had finally adopted. "What is then the toad?" said he.

Blundell had turned away, as if annoyed by the interruption.

"What a confounded row to make about nothing!"

"Where did you find it?" continued Heinsicht, looking from one to the other.

"It found me, I can tell you," said Jack. "I was going to bed, having nothing else to do, and in the dark I trod upon the beggar. Here, Ralph, it's for you."

"Ah!" said Heinsicht, drawing in his breath, as a closer inspection revealed to him the nature of the supposed toad. "I see now. It is a little relic, a treasure. It has fallen into the wrong hands, Blondell. You must take it, and keep it, and wear

it here—here,” touching his breast as he spoke. “That is where a lady’s tokens should be laid.”

“Who mentioned a lady?” said Blundell, keeping his temper with an evident effort. “Have you never seen me with a rose in my button-hole? I say, I have got a lot of work to do to-night; just go off, and leave me alone, like good fellows.”

It was past midnight ere the work was finished, and he went on deck for a breath of fresh air before turning in for the night.

A scene of wild and solemn beauty awaited him there.

They had anchored in a narrow basin whose waters were seldom ruffled, and whose depths of shade were at this time rendered still more intense, by the single broad streak of silver which shot across the opening.

All around, giant mountains, sunk in their endless lethargy, rose into an empty moonlit heaven. Parts of them, ghostly in their brightness, stood out to view, but the greater portion was a vast, indistinguishable mass, without form and void.

No living thing stirred on land or sea. Not a sound vibrated on the ear.

The solitary beholder of this sublime spectacle, Blundell, was not of a nature to view it with indifference.

It was at this midnight hour, when free from the observation of his companions, that he had of late sought, at times, to recall the feelings which had influenced him so powerfully a few months before.

The suspicion that he was no longer impressed as he had formerly been by the remembrance of the appalling scene, with which he had been wont to feed his imagination, had changed into a certainty. He had used it as the most potent means of exciting his fading energies into a fresh maintenance of the new life he desired to lead. It had palled at length, and every time he would have tried the effect anew, it had proved to be weaker.

So great had been the first shock, that by one mighty upheaval it had torn up the old life by the roots.

Then the empty heart, swept and garnished, remained vacant, with the door open. And now, alas! the banished spirit was on the watch, eager to regain his lost possession.

"It has been no fault of mine," and then followed the bitter cry, the amazing accusation of the man yielding up the mastery, "*It was God's fault who sent those men here!*"

The struggle was at an end; he was vanquished.

Before he went to sleep, he softly undid the little window, picked up the rose, and let it float away upon the water.

PART II.

BLUNDELLSAYE.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST PLUNGE.

'Fog, and mist, and rain,
Dark, and sad, and grey,
Floating over the quiet land—
Oh, dull November day!
Fear, and doubt, and care,
Dark, and sad, and grey,
My misty thoughts are ta'en from you,
Oh, dull November day!'

THERE are certain mornings in the year, on which it seems appropriate and natural to hear of a misfortune.

On such a day the leaves are dropping from the trees, the wind moans dismally, over the plains there hangs a dense white veil, the heavens above are dark, and the air is chill. Almost *any* event would be welcomed—almost anything of any kind, to stir up, were it even to wrath, the stagnant pool of commonplace, which engulfs life for the time being. The postman has been.

Has he indeed? You turn your eyes from side to side—your anxious, longing, letter-loving eyes, and they see nothing. Stay, you are wrong: there

is one poor, ill-favoured, thin, blue, marrowless epistle; a wretched unit. It lies on your own plate.

Is that *all*?

Yea, verily. Toss it aside, throw it from you—it is a delusion, an impostor, a bill.

Nay, but in that letter lies your fate, dear reader: lower your scornful, discontented eyelids; give, I pray you, one glance, and think it not too small a matter for your notice.

Therein,——you start! Your lips open! Your eyes dilate!

Now, what is the meaning of this? What has caused that sudden flush, followed by so deadly a pallor? Why that trembling hand, that sinking into the chair by your side, that blank, unresponsive gaze? Are you stricken deaf and dumb? Is there a ringing in your ears, a rushing at your heart—a lightning-flash of perception that, one minute before, you had been happy?

And the letter is so short. It only contains the negative you had taught yourself to believe would never come; the failure that, with your talents and influence, had seemed to be out of the question; the death-blow to expectations, long as your life; or the curt statement, that a little toy you had amused yourself with had not turned out as well as had been expected.

Some such trifle. And at length you find a mask wherewith to smile and repel intrusion—or, it may be, only breath to wonder and weep; and through Novembers to come, when the sky is grim, and the earth is dank, and the wind howls, you will sigh and whisper, “It happened on just such a day as this!”

So perchance will sigh Pauline, when the ills of poverty have come home to her, and she has learned to know something of its stern pressure. When that uninteresting envelope had been opened, and the few lines perused which conveyed the intelligence that she and Tom were penniless, the brave girl had made light of the matter. If Tom, she said, could be brought not to mind—if he would lay his shoulder to the wheel, and work as a man should—it would signify little to either of them that they must from henceforth forego the luxuries, and confine their wishes to the necessities, of life. Neither of them cared for luxuries—they had no expensive habits—they would manage excellently. She was only sorry that so much had been said about a trouble which was really not worth the sympathy expended upon it.

Poor, simple, grandiloquent Pauline!

What she would have done without the shelter offered by her father's sister, Mrs. Wyndham, it

would be impossible to say; and yet she could hardly be prevailed upon to accept it.

Why should she not be allowed to stay and make a home for Tom in London, where his guardians had, with some difficulty, secured for him a place in a counting-house? Tom's poor lodging would be lonely and dull. It was only when she had been made to understand that her brother might be absolutely hampered instead of benefited by such an arrangement, that she could be brought to abandon it.

So she is to live with Mrs. Wyndham.

Nothing of this relation has hitherto been mentioned. To her niece she is almost a stranger, their paths in life having lain in different directions; and Pauline's remembrance of her, if not altogether flattering, is indistinct. At present, the lady is staying with the Jermyns at Harmony Court, in B——shire. The river is sweeping along in flood under the windows; the meadows beyond are one vast swamp; and the clouds, yet heavy with rain to come, move solemnly over the sky, and close in the prospect.

Mrs. Wyndham looks out of the low, folding windows, and shudders; but the Grange, of which she has lately concluded a purchase, is not yet ready for her reception, and she has been unable to resist the entreaties of her dear sister-in-law and good

husband, and the sweet girls, to come to them in the meantime.

“They had *so* enjoyed her last visit in the summer,” writes Mrs. Jermyn, “that, although they have *nothing* to offer—no amusements, no company, no *sunshine* even—still they cannot but hope that dear Camilla will *take pity* upon *them*, and will allow them to look forward to the *great pleasure* of seeing her. They must indeed confess that the country is sadly destitute of *charms* at this time of year. They cannot compete with Brighton; and if Brighton is their dear Camilla’s choice, they certainly ought not to *complain*, although they should hardly be able to forbear *disappointment*.”

This excellently-rounded period, with a good deal more of the same sort, hints, cajoleries, and insinuations, was exactly suited to the person for whom it was intended.

Mrs. Wyndham’s good-nature, which was her strongest, and her vanity which was her weakest, point, were alike flattered. With all her inclinations, and the greater part of her worldly goods, in Brighton, she consented to quit the cheerful, noisy, tempting streets, with their daily variety of congenial bustle, and immure herself in a dull country-house, at the bidding of relations who themselves

allowed that there was no excuse for the unreasonableness of their request.

Why such a request had been made we may be permitted to wonder.

To Mrs. Wyndham it was naturally a simple one. Which of us foolish ones is amazed at any anxiety for our presence? We are not dull, or frivolous, or empty-headed to ourselves. We are not, in our own eyes, ordinary-looking men and women, whose appearance to a stranger is so uninteresting, that the infirmity or defect we feel so keenly and take such pains to conceal, is passed over by him, unnoticed.

Look at that little man smiling to himself in the corner. Having been told to look at him, you see that he is there, and that he has red whiskers and a brown greatcoat. But how fussy was that little man over the cut and colour of that great-coat, before it was made to his satisfaction! How particular that his brown necktie—*you* would not even know that he had on a brown necktie—should match it in shade! There is the finger of a brown kid glove peeping from his pocket! And his stick has a silver band with his initials thereon engraved; and his hat is some wonderful hat, and his boots are some wonderful boots, and everything about him is chosen with care and pains, for he is the centre

of lifelong devotion and occupation to one human being—himself.

Your cousin Angeline is a nonentity, and a troublesome creature to boot. Nobody cares to have her for their guest, and it is with difficulty you extract from the head of the house the invitation, which duty alone prompts you to send her. But Angeline, unconscious and important, looks at it differently. She is doubtful about accepting, does not send a decided negative (for which you would be thankful), but will reply in a few days. She hopes she *may* be able to come, only she has so many engagements, and having postponed other invitations, she would not like anybody to be hurt. May she leave it an open question? Would it be inconvenient if she were to offer herself by-and-by? She will consult the others, and see what they say, &c. &c. &c., to the tune of three sheets of a letter, all about this momentous question.

Listen to the narrator of an anecdote. How often he has been called "My dear fellow," by the great man whom the anecdote is about. How earnestly has his opinion been sought, and how authoritatively has he laid down the law, in reply. One marvels at the deference paid to such a weakling—until one remembers that the weakling is the speaker. Even as you look upon him, he beholds

your gaze, and metamorphoses it. He is his own centre of all things. The universe moves around him.

Mrs. Wyndham, as we have said, saw nothing extraordinary in her sister-in-law's letter, nothing to wonder at, that a little fidgety twaddling woman, encumbered with fancies, whims, likings and dislikings, destitute of resources, and dependent on those around her for amusement, should be eagerly solicited to become a member of a quiet family party. A few plaintive regrets she gave to Brighton, and set forth to gratify the praiseworthy desire.

Harmony Court had been intended for a purely summer residence by its first proprietor, a man of refined tastes, and delicate health, who passed the autumn and winter months in a warm climate, returning to England towards the latter end of May. At that season of the year, he found a perfect paradise of repose in the long low building, nestling amid its creepers, and was accustomed, when absent, to recall with delight its velvet lawn, swept by the weeping ash and willow, its cool colonnade of roses, its sparkling river, and bell-tongued nightingales.

But Mr. Jermyn, the next possessor of the property, was unfortunately not able to preserve the charming picture, complete, in his mind. He had stretched a point to buy the place, and, having

bought it, he meant to live at it. He had neither the means nor the inclination to move his family from one spot to another; and accordingly Harmony Court, exulted in from May to October, had to be endured from October to May.

Mrs. Jermyn, indeed, had the usual ladylike excuses of her doctor, her dentist, or her dress-maker, always ready, when a run up to town was felt to be desirable; and invitations for Charlotte and Minnie were usually accepted; but still there was ample experience to be had by all, that the most beauteous and bewitching retreat in the "leafy month of June," is commonly the most unwholesome and unlovely in the leafless month of November.

It is at this most doleful season of the year, however, that Mrs. Wyndham has been persuaded to transfer herself and her belongings to B——shire, in which, during her summer infatuation, she had purchased a comfortable residence, within easy distance of the Jermyns. Her stay at Harmony Court has been prolonged from one week to another, and still the Grange is not ready, and still Mrs. Jermyn presses her not to leave them. Pauline shall be made welcome also—there is room, abundance of room; and accordingly Pauline is expected upon the afternoon on which we now take up our tale.

The ladies are sipping their tea in the drawing-

room. Mrs. Jermyn, stout and fair, with rather too much cap on her head, and rather more than enough smile on her face, lounges in the easy-chair by the fire. By the table are the two daughters of the house—Charlotte, tall, talkative, clever; Minnie, ordinary.

Mrs. Wyndham, in the arm-chair opposite, toys with the screen which her still delicate complexion renders necessary, if she is to enjoy dear Selina's charming fire. The lace at the back of her little head is costly, diamonds sparkle on her fingers, and everything about her is rich and valuable.

Perhaps we may now suspect why she is invariably "dear Camilla," and "your dear aunt," and "our dear guest," in Mrs. Jermyn's lips; and why it is only when mamma's back is turned, and papa's too, that Charlotte Jermyn crouches down to half her height, and minces about the room, simpering and grimacing, talking nonsense in a finely accentuated voice, and cackling a little artificial laugh.

How angry mamma would be if she knew!

It is very wrong, very *undutiful*, to laugh at one's own relations. It is extremely *absurd* to lie at the catch for small defects. So kind, so indulgent an aunt! What would Charlotte and Minnie do without aunt Camilla, who treats them as if they were her *own* children, and takes them to town,

and makes them all those *beautiful* presents? She hopes that none of *her* children will ever be found *ungrateful*. She cannot answer for others; Camilla of course knows best about her own relations, but——, and the head is shaken portentously.

They are discussing the new arrangement, you understand; and Charlotte has been incautious.

Mamma cannot conceive what she means, is really astonished that a daughter of hers should be found wanting in *respect*. She considers that Pauline is quite in luck, quite *in luck* to find such a charming home. After such a sad misfortune, such a miserable business altogether, to have fallen on her feet as she has! No hardship, no privations, only the kindest and most *generous* of relations waiting to receive her with open arms!

“And kill her in a week!” breaks out the rebellious daughter. “You need not look so indignant, mamma. She will do it with the best intentions. Oh, yes: she will call her ‘my dear,’ and ‘my love,’ and beg her to take care of her health, and insist on her going out every day in the carriage, and not walking too far, and not reading too much, and not doing anything else in the world than sitting by her side, listening to her ceaseless clatter, clatter, clatter from morning till night.”

“Charlotte! I——. We were just having a little

discussion about your domestic affairs, Camilla," explains Mrs. Jermyn, as her sister-in-law's entrance rather alters the nature of that discussion, and annihilates the response she had begun. "Minnie, a footstool for your aunt. Cold, dear? A little shawl for your shoulders? Minnie will fetch one in a moment. What were we saying? Oh, it was about your future inmate at the Grange. I only hope, my dear, that it will not be too much for you; the charge, I mean the complete *charge* of a great girl like that! And such a risk as living together always is! You must let us know—that we shall *insist* upon—if it does not answer, and some other plan must be adopted. We shall feel ourselves responsible for the comfort of the Grange, as it was *we* who introduced you to the neighbourhood."

Mrs. Wyndham has had this fact impressed upon her memory rather oftener than she cares for, already; but she is in the habit of considering Selina a good creature, and makes allowance for her anxiety on a point where anxiety cannot but be flattering.

Mrs. Jermyn runs on. "It ought to be considered in the light of a *trial* not to be *permanent*, unless all goes on smoothly. If it suits, well. If not, dear, you *promise* to take us into confidence?"

Selina is really *too* kind. Of course it is a *risk*,

and Mrs. Wyndham cannot but feel *nervous*; but still, what else *could* she do? She could not allow the poor dear child to *starve*, and her own *nearest* relation too, her dear *brother's* child.

Camilla is not to be outdone on her own special ground; when these two get together, every second word is accentuated.

"I suppose," responds Mrs. Jermyn, wincing a little under the last observation, "that she has not been much out into the world—that she is little more than a great girl?"

"As tall as Charlotte, my love, and looks older, if anything. Dark-haired people always do look old. That, you know, is proverbial. It is we blondes who keep our youth, I can tell you," proclaims the faded beauty. "We cannot look old if we would. As Colonel Grafton said to me the other day, 'My dear madam,' he said, 'you cannot look old if you would!'"

Mrs. Jermyn protests that the Colonel is right. Her dear sister does not look within *years* of her age, though indeed what that age may be she cannot pretend to *guess*, for she vows she cannot believe, and does not believe, what the family date tells. "Charlotte, your aunt will take another cup of tea. Oh, pray. My dear Camilla, *you* need not be afraid of *embonpoint*!"

“*Embonpoint!* now really!” The screen is thrown playfully forward in the direction of the other arm-chair.

“But it must be half and half only, then,” suffering her cup to be taken. “Just because your mamma presses me. Now, dear Selina, are you sure, quite, absolutely *sure* that it will not inconvenience you to have Pauline? Not in the *least?*”

“A pleasure, dear—a *pleasure*.”

“You are so hospitable. For one week, then; our workmen promise to be gone in one week.”

“And if they are not, Camilla, so much the better.” And so on, and so on.

Into the midst of all this steps Pauline, with a cold, quiet face. Effusive greetings, embraces, questions, and hubbub follow.

“Self-possessed,” comments a certain pair of searching eyes; “decidedly self-possessed. That sort of manner seldom takes. But she is one of the handsomest girls I have ever seen.” Aloud, Mrs. Jermyn is saying pleasantly — “Now I think our traveller would like to take off her warm things, and have a rest before dinner. Would you not Pauline — am I to call you Pauline? We are very nearly relations, you know, and now we are going to be neighbours as well. You must feel this room hot after coming in from the open air. Charlotte will show

you your room, my dear, and I hope it will be comfortable. I think I must stay by the fireside and nurse my cold, as we are engaged to dine out to-morrow evening."

The last announcement was made with a little air that would at once have conveyed to an initiated ear that the dining out referred to was not an ordinary event in the household; but it was lost on Pauline.

With a polite hope that the lady would soon be better, she followed Charlotte, and was ushered upstairs.

"Good-looking! No, I don't call her so very good-looking! What do you say, Charlotte?" Mrs. Wyndham is peevishly exclaiming, as Charlotte re-enters the drawing-room. "Anybody looks well coming in out of the fresh air, among such a set of pasty faces as we have got. What have we all been about, moping indoors the whole afternoon? Why don't you girls go out? I have a great mind to take a turn myself. But no, I should certainly catch cold in this dreadful fog. Ah! what a climate it is! And what a situation you have got here, my dear children! I trust I shall be fit for Sir John's dinner-party. I am beginning to cough already."

"Put a little coal on the fire, Charlotte," suggests

her mother. "Why did you come down so soon, my love?"

"I did not know I was to stay, mamma."

"Could you not have given her some little help? She has no maid, you know, and with all her things to unpack——"

"I will go back again by-and-by. She did not want me just now, I am sure." "Let the poor thing alone, can't you?" mutters Charlotte, under her breath.

So Pauline is left with the letter in her hand, which had waited for her on the drawing-room mantelpiece since the day before.

It is from Tom, who is staying with some friends in the north. He is going to London, to begin his work there, in a few days. Meantime they are having good sport, and there is a houseful of people, and it is very jolly.

All this his sister reads musingly; but she comes to a part by-and-by on which her eyes fasten, and a keen, eager look darts into her face. This dies away, and, with dropping eyelids, there follows the sob, and cry, "If I had only been sent anywhere——anywhere else!"

There is a tap at the door, her hands unclasp, she tries to look composed, and turns away her head. "Come in." The accents are stiff and un-

inviting, and Charlotte is more convinced than ever that her errand will be unwelcome.

"I came to help you to unpack," replies the intruder, ungraciously. "Can I——?" But here she catches sight of the beautiful young face, which had lately seemed to them all so cold and proud, now flushed, and quivering in pain, and it is, "Oh, do let me stay, dear! I like to be with you, and I am so glad you came," followed by a warm, honestly affectionate kiss, that finds its way to the heart at once.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOT'S REVELATIONS.

"Children and fools speak the truth."

CHARLOTTE JERMYN was in every respect the antipodes of her mother. She was a bluff, downright girl, whose sterling qualities could not fail to meet with a certain amount of appreciation; but, as these were unhappily accompanied by a deficiency in the charms of grace and refinement, they were robbed of the outward garb of attractiveness; and, although possessed of more than one friend, she had never had a lover.

This gave her no uneasiness. She was willing to please, and be pleased; but she could exist without admiration—she only exacted amusement.

The follies of her aunt were tolerated with cheerful equanimity, as long as they appealed to her sense of humour, and as long as she could put an end to the entertainment at any moment she chose, by leaving the room. But to be tied down to Mrs. Wyndham's presence for the greater portion of every day

of her life, would have been to her too irksome an existence to have been borne.

Hence the sympathy for Pauline, the unguarded expression of which drew forth her mother's rebuke in the last chapter.

Mrs. Jermyn was as sincere in the administration of that rebuke as a perfectly insincere woman can be, when speaking without reserve or restraint.

As she expatiated upon Miss La Sarte's good fortune in finding such a home, at a time when a home of any sort was sorely needed, she felt strong in the power of truth. She did, in reality, covet the position she extolled. Not, however, on account of the advantages it openly offered, not because of the domestic happiness and the affectionate welcome, on which her eloquence expended itself with fullest unction; these, we may safely aver, did not excite her envy.

But the secret office of Mrs. Wyndham's flatterer and sycophant was one she would gladly have filled, either in person or by proxy.

On this she had counted in the first delightful triumph consequent on the purchase of the Grange. To have Camilla at their very door; to have brought her there themselves; to behold her admired and caressed, a woman of consequence in the neighbourhood, and yet admitting none to her confidence but

her *own relations*, one or other of whom would be invariably by her side;—this was what her prophetic vision had unfolded to Mr. Jermyn's eyes, and she had been intoxicated by the prospect.

The future acquaintances, parties, furniture, and equipages of her sister-in-law formed endless matter for conjecture or affirmation, and more than one half-hour had been spent in calculating on the probability of Camilla's preferring gold to silver lace on her coachman's hat.

Sir John Finch had gold, Major Soames had silver. Camilla would certainly be oftener driven over to Finch Hall than to the Major's cottage. Consequently, as variety is pleasant, Mrs. Jermyn would have preferred silver, but she had a conviction that Camilla would select gold.

This was, however, only a pleasurable meditation—there was no one real drawback to her flutter of excitement and happy anticipation.

Time drew on, and the unfortunate lady stood on the very brink of the exquisite mirage, when it suddenly became dim and blurred.

This was Pauline's doing.

Good heavens! a niece, and a La Sarte, coming to divert the reflected glory of the Grange from falling on Harmony Court! An interloper, a mischief-maker, one of Camilla's blood and race, with claims

upon her superior to those of the Jermyns, stepping in between the two!

Naturally Camilla would incline towards one of her own family, if only for pride's sake (tacitly admitting the La Sarte's right to precedence), and the new-comer, an artful Frenchified girl, would spare no pains to improve her opportunity.

Pauline was to be regularly domesticated at the Grange, would take the bottom of the table,—act, in a manner, as hostess when the Jermyns came over—the Jermyns, who had looked upon the Grange as little less than their own,—and would, in a word, completely unseat Charlotte and Minnie from the niche to which their fond mother had in her dreams elected them.

With difficulty she had commanded her countenance and her voice when informed of the downfall of her hopes.

She had entreated her sister-in-law to reconsider the matter, had pointed out with considerable fertility of imagination the evils likely to ensue from the proposed amalgamation; but she could do no more: even she had not dared to suggest to Mrs. Wyndham that a daughter of the house of La Sarte should take steps towards providing for her own maintenance.

At such a proposal, Camilla's eye would have flashed.

For a vain woman, she was curiously proud; and Mrs. Jermyn knew that on any point relating to family dignity, she must touch with extreme delicacy and caution.

She had therefore been compelled to confine herself to affectionate condolences and ingenious prognostications of mischief.

On the other hand, a few lines from Mrs. Wyndham's brother had settled the question. "I have done my best for Tom, and of course you will take his sister."

Mrs. Jermyn felt that "of course" as her death-warrant, and gave up the contest.

"So then, my love, it really is *to be*, and we must all hope it will turn out for the best," she had cried, trying hard to wring a smile out of her blank face.

"When a thing is once *decided* upon, Camilla, you are too good a creature to think of *drawing back*."

Camilla was—too good or too dense. She did not follow the idea thus slipped in edgeways. And that effort had been Mrs. Jermyn's final one.

Her *bête noire* has now actually arrived, and

the inaugural ceremony has taken place under her own roof.

The next morning, Pauline having driven out with her aunt, a little episode takes place in the breakfast-room. All the other ladies are gathered there, when the door opens, and Dot, an inquisitive eight-year-old piece of precocity, spoilt by her mother, and snubbed by her sisters, strolls idly in.

Instantly there is a lull in the conversation, for experience has warned all present that Dot is not a safe listener. Mamma returns to the account-book on the table before her, Charlotte takes up her work, and Minnie goes away. This is hard on Dot, who is instantly possessed of a raging desire to know the extent of her deprivation. "What is it all about?" peevishly demands the innocent. "What are you all talking about? I know you were talking, for I heard you outside, and you stopped when I came in. You never tell me anything."

Charlotte.—"Get away, child. You shouldn't listen, and then you would not know whether you were told or not."

Dot.—"I did not listen, I only *heard*. I'll listen next time though, and *you* won't know whether I'm there or not."

"You will only get punished, you stupid little thing. Why are you not at your lessons?"

"Mademoiselle is not coming to-day. She has a headache."

"Well, go to the school-room, then. We can't have you here."

"You are always sending me away," whimpers the child. "Mayn't I stay, mamma? Mayn't I stay?"

An uplifted pen, enjoining silence, is her only answer; whilst mamma's lips move, in silent addition of figures that will not balance correctly.

Accordingly there breaks forth Imperious whine No. 2. "Mayn't I stay, mamma?"

"Stay? Yes, poor child! why not?" The sum is finished, and noted down. "Stay if you like," replies Mrs. Jermyn, cheerfully.

"Oh, of course she may stay, and of course she may do whatever she likes, and pry into everything, and carry tales, and make mischief, as she always does!" exclaims the sister, disrespectfully. "But I, for one, decline to be pryed into. I shan't stay if she does."

"Charlotte is so cross to me, mamma," from the plaintiff.

"Charlotte, how can you be so cross to the poor child? What harm is she doing you? And don't you see she is not well?"

Exit Charlotte without reply. Dot, briskly, "What is it about, mamma?"

"About, my dear?"

"It's about Pauline, I know, for I heard them say her name. What is about her and Aunt Camilla? Do tell me, mamma. You might tell me."

"Oh, never mind, my dear. Little girls can't be told everything."

"But I want to know, mamma, and I won't tell anybody else. Do say, mamma. Mamma, do say."

"My dear, poor Pauline has lost all her money, and kind Aunt Camilla is going to take her to live at the Grange. That is all."

"But why are you *sorry* that she is come? Why did you say you wished to goodness that she had been sent anywhere else? I *heard* you say that, mamma." And with the words the small cunning eyes (apparently a pair of her own, made down for Dot) search her through and through.

"How did you know I was speaking of Pauline, child? You should not fasten down to any particular person half a sentence that your ears happen to catch when you are coming into a room. The greatest mistakes in the world are made in that way," cleverly observes mamma, with an impressive air.

"Oh, but I *heard* you say Pauline." Dot nods

her head to enforce the emphasis. "So there wasn't *any* mistake. And I know I *don't* make mistakes; I *never* do. I heard you say it quite distinctly; and I want to know why? Because it's funny" (mysteriously) "that somebody else wishes the very same thing, and he wrote it too."

"Who wrote it? What do you mean? Wrote it to you?"

"Oh no; to her—to Pauline. He wrote, or she wrote—somebody wrote; but you tell me first, and then I will tell you."

"What am I to tell you, silly one? You know all I said, it seems, already. But, Dot, remember, that if you repeat it to any one—sisters or Aunt Camilla, or *any one*—I shall be very, very greatly ill-pleased indeed. It would be most unkind, most *unfeeling* to say it again. Remember that. If I thought I could not trust you, I should never have told you now."

"You never did tell me, mamma. You didn't tell me a thing. I heard it all for myself, and the other one too, and I want to know *why*?"

A laboured explanation, and then, "What do you mean about the other one? It was odd of Pauline to read out her letter to a child like you."

"Oh, she didn't read it," Dot candidly allows, "*I* read it."

"You? How did you read it?"

"I read it, because I found it. I found it in her room, under the dressing-table, when you were all at dinner. And I gave it to her afterwards."

"Oh, Dot, for shame! To read people's letters, and then come and tell what was in them! Never do that again, my dear; it is a very naughty thing to do."

"It was only a little bit, mamma" (slightly abashed). "It was only because it was about Mr. Blundell; and Roberts says he thinks Mr. Blundell is to come back to-day, and that we shall not be allowed to go through the farm any more. We do like to go through the farm so much, and he has been away so long. I wonder why he should come back at all."

"You are making some mistake, child. It could not be the same Mr. Blundell; or you have read the name wrong. Pauline is not likely to know anything about this Mr. Blundell."

"Somebody knows, who wrote the letter. Who was it wrote the letter?"

"Her brother—her brother, dear," impatiently.

"He knows, then. He called him Blundell; and oh, I am sure it was our *very own* Mr. Blundell, because the letter *said* he was coming back, and Roberts said so too?"

"And was this all? I really think, Dot, you ought to tell me all you read—though I don't approve of your reading it, mind, and you must never do such a thing again—but you had better tell me now what you can remember, just that I may show you what a silly little head you have got to take up such fancies."

"I didn't take up fancies." Dot grows sullen. "I saw it, and I am sure I was right. It said he was on his way to Blundellsaye—oh, *there!* It said, *Blundellsaye*, so of course it was him——"

"'He,' dear, not 'him.'" Mrs. Jermyn corrects, coolly; but in reality she is impressed. "And what besides, Dot?"

"Oh, just that. And then directly after—because I was reading that, and I *saw* just below—'I wish you had been sent anywhere else.' And I did not read any more—not a word. I wonder why he wished Pauline had been sent anywhere else? She has not been sent to Blundellsaye!"

"William," said Mrs. Jermyn, carelessly addressing her husband, at the luncheon-table, and choosing a pause, when her words could not but be heard by every one at table. "Did you know that Mr. Blundell returns home to-day? I daresay we shall meet him to-night at Finch Hall."

The moment for the remark was carefully chosen, and she was inclined to think she had done well in making it.

CHAPTER XV.

THAT'S WHAT I THINK OF HIM!

“Oh wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see oorsels as ithers see us!”

It is half-past six o'clock in the evening, and the dressing-bell has rung at Finch Hall.

Can there be a greater bore among bores than the dressing-bell? Imagine the bore magnified to its greatest degree. Picture to yourself a blazing fire to be left behind; a newspaper, still unread, to be abandoned; a bundle of aching limbs to be forced up-stairs, and the prospect of transferring the same to fresh garments in the cool atmosphere of a November evening, and you may perhaps arouse in your bosom, if it is a pitiful one, some sense of compassion for young Dolly Finch, who, left by himself in the library at the close of a hard day's hunting, sunk in the depths of an arm-chair, and full of weary comfort, was just dropping off into a gentle doze when he was sharply aroused by the unwelcome summons.

Dolly was the sworn enemy of bells in general,

and of this imperious courtyard bell—this harsh, noisy, inexorable clang-clang—in particular.

It never found him ready. It never found him ashamed.

According to his mood, he regarded it with indifference or disgust.

The present was an evening for indifference. There was nobody by to order him off; he sputtered a sleepy execration, blinked his eyelids, frowned, and looked straight in front of him.

All was peaceful again, and the flickering firelight wooed his outraged feelings to forgetfulness. His head drooped forward, and hung upon his breast.

Anon he heard the sweet music of the hounds, and the patter of hoofs. Now he is sailing over an empty field, the fox well in sight. He loses her! He clears a fence! Hi, he is down! Some one is pulling him from under the horse, shaking him, shouting in his ears with a voice like a trumpet. He starts to his feet, and manfully grasps—the arm-chair!

By his side stands his father, observing, with a gentle yawn, "Wake up, Dolly. Time to dress."

Heavily sighed poor Dolly now.

There would be no further respite. He was still in pink; his boots were splashed, and his cap and whip lay on the floor by his side.

He must go, of course. Of course. He is going. He is only waiting a moment. Where is his cap? Eh? The voice growing ever more and more inarticulate."

"Dolly, Dolly, Dolly! Time to dress, you know."

"All right, sir," with another sigh. "Lots of time."

"Not such lots, I can tell you. It is, by me, let me see—it only wants a quarter now. And there are some people coming to dinner, you know."

"I'll be ready," creeping to the front of the chair, in preparation for the effort of rising. "I don't take any time."

"Well, you had better be as quick as you can. I went down to the farm just now," continued Sir John, "and——"

"Oh, I forgot," broke in Dolly, calling his wits together. "I meant to tell you, Benson says we shan't get those oats. Ralph Blundell's come back."

"I was going to tell you that. I passed him outside the gate just now."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Oh, I gave him a sort of nod. There were half-a-dozen of them in the drag—as disreputable-looking a set as usual. That one with the long moustache, he was there. What do you call him? Harcourt? Chaworth—that's it. He was facing me.

Blundell was driving, and that young cousin of his, Wilmot Blundell's son, whom I suppose he has undertaken to lead to the dogs as fast as it can be done, was on the box beside him."

"I hope you were not rude to him, sir?"

"I was not *rude* to him. I don't know what you mean by being *rude* to him. I just gave him a nod like this," repeating the performance. "I did not take off my hat, and salaam down to the ground before him—if you mean that."

Whether he meant that or not, Dolly did not explain. He was silent, gazing thoughtfully into the fire, and after a few moments thus passed, the father continued, bringing his eye-brows together, and scanning his son's countenance as he spoke, "You are not intending to call there, I suppose?"

"I must, some time or other. You won't; and if neither of us went; it would look so abominably uncivil."

"What do we care if it does look uncivil? We have no particular need to show civility to a man who is the pest of the neighbourhood."

"I must just call," said Dolly, with decision. "Don't ask him here, unless you like. But everybody will call."

"You will do as you please, of course. You usually do. But I shall have nothing to say to him."

"I cannot imagine why you should make it a personal matter, sir. He has never done you any harm that you know of."

"He won't do *me* any harm, I'll take very good care of that. *I*'m not likely to be harmed; but there are those who are, and not very far off either. I won't have you making a friend of that man, Dolly; so you need not think of it."

"Making a friend of him, because I leave a card!"

"Ay, making a friend of him. That will be the next thing. You will meet him with the hounds, and you will be invited to Blundellsaye, and you will go wherever he asks you, and do whatever he tells you——"

"A precious fool you make me out!" broke forth Dolly, never more indignant than at a hint of this kind.

"Fool enough, if anybody asks you to play the fool," unhesitatingly rejoined his father.

"Do you think I have no mind of my own, sir?"

"Mind of your own? No. If you have any mind of your own, it is kept for your mother, and sisters, and me. For the rest anybody may pull you about with a string."

This was too much—the young man flushed with passion.

"That's a nice sort of thing to say to a fellow! It's a beastly shame to say such a thing!"

He rose to go, and the father's heart smote him.

"Well, Dolly, it was. I ask your pardon, and let me see I was wrong as soon as you can. I don't wish to see a son of mine tied to his mother's apron-string any more than you do. Choose your friends, bring them here, and so long as they are respectable, and gentlemen, they shall always have a welcome. But take my advice—it is only my *advice*, mind—and have nothing to do with Ralph Blundell."

Blundell's reappearance was commented upon at the dinner-table that evening, with the alacrity a new topic must ever inspire.

There was a large party, but although Mrs. Jermyn had opined that he would be present, none of the others had expected for a moment to meet him. It was years since he had been seen at Finch Hall, where sobriety and decorum had always prevailed, and where an irregular life was less likely to meet with toleration than at any other house in the neighbourhood.

Nevertheless the event was interesting, even to the hosts. They knew Ralph Blundell, and had done so since his boyhood. Lady Finch asked

after him in a maternally sad voice. She could not help feeling grieved whenever she looked across to that deserted, lonely house. She remembered the two brothers, such fine manly boys, always together, and so fond of each other, that you never saw them apart.

Their poor mother was so proud of them! She used to say her sons were better to her than any daughter could have been. As long as she lived, everything had gone on smoothly at Blundellsaye. The poor young men! They had been left so entirely without restraint afterwards, that one ought to have the deepest pity for them,—one ought to make the greatest allowances.

The gentle creature being well out of her husband's hearing gave free vent to the feelings her compassionate nature prompted.

At the other end of the table, the tone adopted towards the same subject was different.

Had there not been something strange about Ralph Blundell lately? What was it? Had he been off his head? Had he never been at Blundellsaye since his brother's death? Where had he been? Was he all right now?

It was not without emotion that Pauline heard the name bandied from one to the other.

There was no need for her to speak. No one

imagined that a stranger could have any remark to make on a subject that had so purely local an interest. They did not trouble her with it; but adapting himself to her presumed taste, a little man on her left hand, who had been appealed to as an authority more than once, thus addressed her—

“And I suppose croquet is quite discarded for lawn-tennis now?”

“I suppose so,” said she, absently.

“Are you a great player?”

“A—a what?”

“A great lawn-tennis player. The ladies about here are uncommonly good at it.”

“Are they? Which?”

He stared a little. “Oh, that one in pink down there is one of our best hands. She and her sister play splendidly. It is the greatest fun in the world having one of them for your partner; you have nothing to do but to stand still with your bat in your hand, and let her run about! You are sure to win.”

A sympathetic smile disguised her inattention, and he proceeded easily.

“I don't say I'm a good player, you know; I don't say that. I never can hit the balls when there are a lot of people about, and everybody

seems in a fuss and bustle. I can play splendidly by myself. At least I could, if it weren't for that nuisance of a net. Don't you think the net is a nuisance? I don't see but that we should do just as well without it. No one wants a game to be such desperately hard work."

"No, certainly," replied she, catching the last sentence.

"I often go out and have a round when there is nobody by," he continued, confidentially, and I hit every time. 'Pon my word I do. I never miss. People say to me sometimes at parties, 'Fennel, how on earth don't you play better? You are always at it.' But they never see me when I am by myself, you know. It puts me out playing with other people."

"Yes?"

"It was just the same at croquet. I could play it splendidly, if I was let alone; but people used to get in one's way so awfully. And then I never could find my ball, for somebody always must needs send it somewhere just when it was wanted! I used to say to the people, 'My good people, if you would only have the goodness to let me alone, I could get through my hoops well enough; but it is so confoundedly disagreeable to be interfered with at every moment.' Just when all the world is standing

looking on at one part of the ground, you know, to have to go running about all over the place in search of your ball! It really is too bad, sometimes! I used to get awfully sat upon at croquet, Miss La Sarte. 'Pon my word I did."

"That is over now — isn't it?" She tried to speak pleasantly, tried to smile, and do her part as became a well-mannered young woman; but it was hard work, for reasons not difficult to imagine.

He was satisfied, however, and recommenced. "It is one comfort that there are such a lot of balls at lawn-tennis."

"Yes—there are—there ought to be a number always."

"Only nobody seems to care how they send a ball at you. It is up about your ears all in a moment, before you know it's off. And then they—they expect you to send it back again, you know," to Charlotte Jermyn, on his other side.

"Do they? Actually?" said she.

"They ought to send it fair—oughtn't they? They ought to give a fellow a chance of seeing it coming towards him, instead of whizzing it over the net, within an inch of the top. I always send my balls a good long way up. There is nothing more stupid than people trying to show off, and

making themselves disagreeable. Especially in a game."

"Who was it now, Mr. Fennel? Somebody has been maltreating you, I know."

But Mr. Fennel was prudent, and would not reveal his persecutors.

He had no desire to converse with Charlotte, and had already begun to be fascinated by the fair lady on his right hand, wherefore he turned again to her. So far, he certainly could not be said to have gained much of her attention; but attributing this to maidenly bashfulness, he essayed to overcome it.

Pauline had been silent, thinking on what she had heard before this chatterer began.

She had half expected to meet Blundell himself this evening. She had almost looked forward to the meeting, so strong was her resolution to face him with the same smile wherewith she had bidden him "good-bye," to chat with him easily, answer his questions with indifference, and recall reminiscences with spirit.

It had been a relief to find the party complete without him; but, perhaps, it had been something of a disappointment also.

She was so anxious to test her courage; nay, more, to prove to him that if he had suspected, if

he ever could have suspected—pshaw! suspected what? Was it likely that he would for a moment contemplate such an absurdity, as that there had been found, not *one*, but *two*—two, so inordinately simple as to mistake the meaning of a few common compliments?

For Elsie, poor impulsive child—for a girl of seventeen, who had seen nobody, and had been nowhere, it was a trifle; but for *her*, in all the dignity of her twenty-one years—she could but blush to think of it!

Well, she would stand before him now, and let her face dare him to imagine anything so wild and fabulous.

Oh, how nicely she would talk about their pleasant meeting, their charming sail, the fine weather which had preceded his stay, and which had returned to them immediately after his departure! She would not make the two years which had passed since they met, excuse for any lapse of memory. Rather, she would have it all fresh before her (as indeed it was). She would playfully assure him, that whatever he might have done, they had good cause to remember his visit. He had inflicted on them too many stay-at-home afternoons. Never before or since had such rain been seen at Gourloch,

and he had taken it away with him when he went. He was undoubtedly the "Flying Dutchman."

After this neat and happy opening, to all of which he would of course make suitable rejoinders—they could slide into an easy vein. Conventional topics would follow, and the worst would be over.

They might meet afterwards, as often as a small neighbourhood rendered probable; she would not care.

"Do you hunt at all?" said Mr. Fennel. He had finished his *pâté!* and was unwilling to remain longer silent. The *pâté* had claimed his attention at the moment when he was turning from Charlotte to Pauline, and he had found it good.

Pauline started. Why could he not let her alone, this little rabbit-faced man, with his head half under the table?

"No, I don't," she replied, snappishly.

"Do you"—slowly—"skate?"

"No."

"Oh?"

A pause, in which, "Oh, dear, Mr. Jermyn, I had never heard that before!" "Did you know the Boorhams, Lady Finch?" "Miss Willoughby says the hounds were quite at fault." "Ha! ha! ha!

Did you hear that, Major?" were audible in bass and treble notes up and down the table.

Pauline had a moment's respite. Then, "Why don't you hunt?" resumed the little man by her side.

"I don't think I care for it."

"But you could, if you tried. That's to say unless you are nervous. It won't do to be nervous, you know; but I am sure," with his little eyes bent tenderly upon her—"I am sure that *you* are not nervous, Miss La Sarte?"

Whether or not, he was never fated to learn. A loud, passionate voice had risen above the others, and the broken utterances, audible to all at the lower end of the table, had deafened Pauline's ear to his tasteless prattle. The speaker was Sir John Finch. "He is a disgrace to the neighbourhood! That is what I think, and I don't care who hears me! What are you knocking me under the table for?" in an angry aside to his son (whom a disarrangement of the dinner-table had placed by his side). "I *will* say what I think in my own house."

"Do be quiet, sir, for your own sake." Dolly's still lower reply was just heard, and no more. He was red with vexation, and hung his head over the plate before him.

"For *my* sake? For *whose* sake?" cried the old

man, nervously clasping and unclasping his hands, and glaring from side to side. "It is not for *my* sake, I can tell you. Tchick! let me alone, can't you? I say, I am sorry he has ever come back; and I hope, whatever other people may do, that no son of mine——"

"Major Soames," said Dolly, loudly, "were you—ah,—did you, ah,—how did you get out of that slough after all? It was rather a nasty place to get into, wasn't it?"

But of whom had they been talking? Who was it the father would keep from his son? For whose return was he sorry?

Do what she would, Pauline could not rid herself of the foolish idea, that if a name had been mentioned, it would have been that of Blundell.

Absurd, was it not? So absurd as to rouse her indignation. Supposing that it *had* been, what then was the meaning of it? He might indeed—she could not say—she supposed it was not unlikely that at one time or other of his life he had not been all he ought to be. He had lived as other men of the world live.

It was sad, of course—terribly sad. But the follies of youth, renounced and forsaken, were they to be held over him for the term of his life?

He was no longer very young, he had spoken of

them with repugnance, with resolution to —— . . .
“But I suppose you like dancing?” The voice was that of her tormentor. He had still hope; the persistent little countenance shone with a new inspiration. She did not hunt; she did not skate; she responded but coldly to suggestions of lawn-tennis, and once-honoured croquet; but dancing! he had about hit it now. Every girl, in her heart, liked dancing.

“Surely you like dancing, Miss La Sarte?”

“I *hate* it,” said Pauline.

Charlotte Jermyn, on his other side, laughed aloud.

“Why do you not try to find out my tastes, Mr. Fennel? I hunt, and I skate, and I dance; and you have never so much as taken the pains to ask me if I do or not?”

“Because—because I know you do, Miss Jermyn. And I couldn't ask you when I knew it already—could I, now? Besides, where would be the use? You are rather sharp upon me now, you are indeed.”

“Oh, that was it, was it? But then, when you have once ascertained what Miss La Sarte's inclinations tend to, will you never speak to her afterwards, either? Because, if that is to be the way, I can tell you at once, to save all further trouble on

your part. I will furnish you with a complete list of her likings and dislikings,—the dislikings will swell the list considerably, judging from to-night's experience. Now, will you accept my offer? It is very good-natured of me to make it; and I only behave so generously to you out of consideration for the valiant efforts you have been making all through dinner, and for the scanty success with which they have been rewarded. Now you shall have time and peace to enjoy your olives. You don't really care for talking, I know, though you are such a good talker."

The little man saw he was laughed at, and his eyes shot fire.

"When I do talk, Miss Jermyn, I like, if you please, to choose whom I will talk to."

Saying which, he turned his shoulder upon her.

Charlotte coloured with mortification. She knew the man to be a fool, and had not been by any means delighted to find herself conducted by him to the dining-room; but she had not chosen to be neglected, even by Mr. Fennel.

On her other hand sat a silent, heavily-consuming old gentleman, with whom a few remarks between the courses were all that was attainable.

She had not come to the party to sit without uttering a word. She had not argued with Minnie

for the right of being the Miss Jermyn included in the invitation, for this. Nor had her pink dress been hurried home from the dressmaker, for this. Nor had the first camellia of the season been ruthlessly abstracted from the greenhouse to adorn her hair, for this.

It was rather an event for the Jermyns to dine at Finch Hall, and Charlotte had come prepared to enjoy her evening after a downright, thoroughgoing, robust fashion. The beauty and grace of brown-haired Pauline did not cost her honest heart a pang. She meant to talk, and laugh, and have great fun. So she had told Minnie, to whom the fun would be rehearsed in due time, and who was even now contemplating it, as, Cinderella-like, she spent her lonely evening by the schoolroom-fire.

Alas, for the subject of her visions! Poor Charlotte! When the little worm on whom she had been trampling turned upon her she was dumb. She was astounded, and in a manner shipwrecked. She knew of no navigation which would enable her to steer out of such waters.

That he should dare! *He!* Little Fennel, whom all his neighbours laughed at, and made game of!

And she had rather liked to be on good terms with Little Fennel, too; for Little Fennel went

everywhere and knew everybody, and the Jermyns were not exactly at home in the society to which they were suffered occasionally to gain admittance.

Very few cards had been left at Harmony Court, when it first passed into the hands of the retired attorney; and it had required patience, tact, and time to place the family on the desired level where they now stood, but stood, as it were, on the outside edge.

Little Fennel, contemptible Little Fennel, stood upon this level, firmly established upon both his feet.

He was in the very heart and core of that society, into which they could penetrate no deeper than the rind. He belonged to it by right, knew its customs, used its shibboleths. He was present, invariably present, at those cosy, informal reunions, reports of which chilled the Jermyns' ears; and on the more public occasions, at gatherings from which it would have been a slight to exclude them, Charlotte, standing awkwardly alone, or grasping at the passing salutations of such acquaintances as she possessed, had often been well-pleased to see one whom she could address with any degree of familiarity.

She had been wont to play upon his weakness, to amuse him with her chatter, and to amuse every

one else by the audacity with which she bantered him, the skill wherewith she ministered to his vanity and his credulity.

She had carried this too far. She had been more completely put down than she had ever been in her life before, and that by the last person in the world from whom such a rebuff might have been expected.

In silence, therefore, she drew on her gloves, and followed the other ladies in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT A TERRIBLE MAN.

"He is a fiend, I tell thee! He is a fiend."

"Is he? Then I would fain behold him."

"CHARLOTTE, my love, do come and look at these *beautiful* prints."

Mrs. Jermyn, trying hard to keep her footing on the outer edge of the level before alluded to, was painfully aware of what a narrow and uncomfortable edge it was.

She, too, had had her vexations in the dining-room. Her petty pride had been wounded. No precedence had been given to her.

This, to a nature which loved to dwell on trifles, which made much of small distinctions, meant a great deal.

Undoubtedly, she argued, Mrs. Wyndham had been something above her husband in the social scale; but Mr. Wyndham had been Mrs. Jermyn's brother, and his widow need not have been placed so very much above his sister. There was Camilla

escorted in by a general, and there was Mr. Jermyn's wife left to his aide-de-camp.

Camilla smiling and jubilant; Camilla chattering like a magpie; Camilla joked about *liqueur*!

No one had encouraged Mrs. Jermyn's chatter, and her aide-de-camp, unjust youth, had been sulky. There had been defaulters,—a note had been handed in just before dinner,—and in the consequent readjustment of the table, he felt that he had suffered. Lady Finch had not been happy in her selection.

Nor had the unfortunate lady on whom his spleen vented itself, the comfort of perceiving the rest of her family fare better.

She had noted the neglect of her daughter, whose clouded brow openly betrayed it. As to her husband, provocation in that quarter was chiefly confined to the fact, that, whilst of no importance to anybody, he appeared well satisfied to be ignored.

Impatiently she waited for the move, but her expectation that a change of scene would produce happier results seemed in danger of remaining unfulfilled.

Lady Finch escorted two young mothers upstairs to see Juliet's baby—her own first grandchild. Juliet adhered to Miss La Sarte, the sweet stranger-looking girl. Mrs. Wyndham and the general's wife comfortably filled the sofa in the

chimney-corner; and the Jermyns were again left out in the cold.

"Are they not *exquisite*?"

Charlotte had obeyed the call, and the appeal to her taste was made as she stood by her mother's chair. Mrs. Jermyn was sinking under the weight of an enormous folio, which with one hand she endeavoured to prevent sliding off her knee, the other being occupied with her coffee-cup.

"There was one a few pages back," continued she, "with such a *lovely* light upon it; I think it must have been a Turner. Not that one—no, that was not it; it was not so far back as that."

"Oh, bother the book!" exclaimed her unsympathising companion. "You will let it fall, mamma, or spill your coffee, or something. What made you take up such a great lumbering thing?"

"My dear! *Lumbering*? It is rather heavy; but it is a most *magnificent* volume; and you know how *devoted* I am to pictures of all kinds,"

"Photographs will do, then. Here, take this instead," said Charlotte, handing her an album. "Give me that mountain of a book. It was never meant to be taken off the table."

"Perhaps one could *enjoy* it better there." Mrs. Jermyn still persevered in her pleased and interested smile. "Perhaps a little thing like this is more

easily held. Thank you, Charlotte; now we can look them over nicely together. Who is this, I wonder?"

"No one you are in the least likely to know, mamma. Pass on, or we shall be all night about it."

"How impatient you are, my dear! Oh, there is dear Lady Finch! How very *delightfully* good that is! Herself, exactly as she looked at dinner! And Sir John! Capital! Nothing could be more—— Dear me! is it Sir John? Look, Charlotte. Dress does alter one so! It——"

"Would never turn that old gentleman into Sir John Finch," said Charlotte, with an irrepressible laugh. "Mamma, how can you be so——Don't you see his hat, and his stockings, if you look at nothing else? That is the old Dean, Lady Finch's father, who is over eighty. No more like Sir John than I am!"

"People do get so sadly abused in photographs!" murmured her mother, apologetically. "I thought it was not *very* like; but still——Oh! who are you, my dear?" to a little girl who had entered meanwhile, and was shyly passing up the room. "Come and speak to me," continued Mrs. Jermyn, in her most inviting accents, "and" (inevitable demand) "tell me your name."

The child came reluctantly.

"Well," said the lady, with a smile, "What is it?"

"Marianne."

"Oh! Marianne. And whose little girl are you? Which of these ladies is your mamma?"

"She is not here. I have come with Aunt Louisa. Please let me go to her."

"Aunt Louisa? Which is she?" Lady Finch with her party having reappeared, there was a little gathering on the hearth-rug.

"She is behind them," said the child, readily. "And she looked to me to come, just now." There was no detaining Marianne; and Mrs. Jermyn had again to fall back upon her daughter.

"I thought she could hardly be a *grandchild*," she began. "I could not fancy Lady Finch with a grand-daughter of that age—could you? Charlotte," with a quick change of voice, "Charlotte."

"Well, mamma?"

"Stoop down a little. You can be bending over the book. Don't you think that your and Minnie's white silks would make up into something like that?"

"Lady Finch is speaking to you, mamma."

Caught at the single moment when she was off her guard, Mrs. Jermyn felt that hers was a cruel case. She had been practising smiles and pretty speeches for the best part of half an hour, and after

all her semblance of being pleasantly and profitably occupied, she had been detected in the indecorum of whispering to her daughter, and Lady Finch, evidently with a feeling of apology for past neglect, was hoping that she was not cold, and begging her to come nearer the fire.

After this she could not well plead the absorbing interests of the photograph-book. People don't whisper, and nod, and stare in another direction, if the mind is centred on photographs before them.

She was obliged to rise without referring to her employment — and in rising, to show, not more alacrity than she *felt*, but more than she wished to appear to feel.

Anything, however, was preferable to being longer excluded from the charmed circle; and a little attention for the rest of the evening went far towards consoling her for the mortifications she had undergone at its commencement.

No such mortifications had fallen to the lot of Mrs. Wyndham; and accordingly she was in high good-humour with the whole entertainment.

The company was charming, the decorations beautiful, and the dinner excellent. She did not know when she had had so pleasant an evening.

"Pauline, my love," cried she, on the following day, "you made a perfect sensation! You did in-

deed! What did *you* think, Selina? Am I not right in saying so? And I can tell you, my dears, that there were one or two *partis* present, who were quite unexceptionable, *quite*."

"Mr. Fennel, for instance," said Charlotte, whom a night's rest had so completely restored to serenity that she was disposed to look upon her past discomfiture in the light of a jest. "Mr. Fennel is a *parti* after your own heart, Aunt Camilla. His attentions were quite unequivocal, *quite*. A charming young man, I can assure you. And he had neither eyes nor ears—neither *eyes* nor *ears*—for anybody in the room, but the *one*, the very particular *one*, you know. He has the *savoir faire* to perfection, he has indeed. And *that*, so few young men have——"

"Charlotte, you make my head ache," frowned her mother, as the mimicry grew too obvious. "You permit no one to speak but yourself."

"Oh, don't say that, mamma, for I was just going to tell you all about it. You can have no idea of the efforts I made to gain a little, a very little, share of his attention, but it was of no use. 'Pon my word it wasn't!" sliding into the Fennel voice. "I don't say he is much of a companion, you know—I don't say that. But still, it is rather a nuisance to have nobody to talk to at all; don't

you think so? I can talk splendidly by myself, if I am only let alone, but it puts one out so when there are a lot of people all talking at the same time. Especially if there's nobody talking to me. One can't exactly go on talking to one's self at a party, can one?"

Pauline could not but laugh.

"Confess that was good," cried Charlotte, in her own natural manner, "and it will recompense me for all I underwent. *You* know how much that was."

"What are you talking about, my dear?" interposed Mrs. Wyndham, taking all in good part. "I don't quite understand. Mr. Fennel was not rude to you, I hope? He appeared to me to be an agreeable young man, and he was really extremely kind and civil about the Grange. He tells me he will be almost our next neighbour. He is going to call. So are the Finchs, and Major Soames. It seems to me *everybody* is going to call. I foresee we shall be quite *besieged*, Pauline,—I do, indeed."

"You had better not let them in all at once," said Charlotte, mischievously, "or they may do, as the besiegers sometimes did of old, turn upon each other. Admit them one by one, Aunt Camilla, 'on approbation,' as the shopmen say."

"Are *all* to be admitted—all, without exception,

dear?" Mrs. Jermyn was looking significantly at her sister as she spoke, and the look evidently recalled something to Mrs. Wyndham's remembrance.

"What do you say, Pauline? Shall it be a fair field, and no favour? Are we to extend our gracious permission to all, even to this terrible Mr. Blundell?"

"Mr. Blundell!" said Pauline, with a little start.

"Perhaps Pauline may not like to hear him called 'terrible,'" said Mrs. Jermyn. "Did you not say he was a friend, my dear?"

She had not said it, but this escaped the girl. She was upset all in a moment, and her colour went and came, as she answered, stammering, "Of Tom's, yes. I have only met him once, some years ago."

"So you see he may not be 'terrible' at all!" cried Mrs. Jermyn, gaily. "Do you know he is going to be your next neighbour?"

Pauline made no reply.

"For my part, I love a 'terrible' man," babbled Mrs. Wyndham. "And to confess the truth, the man whom I am warned to barricade my doors against, is the very man whom I should like of all others to open them to."

"My dear Camilla!" But Mrs. Jermyn laughed.

By this time Pauline was ready to speak, and there was something she wished to say.

"Mr. Blundell was very kind to Tom when he was a schoolboy, and afterwards I met him at my aunt's, Lady Calverley's. We all liked him very much then. Is there any reason why he——is there anything against him?" she asked, plainly, and then her heart beat with the consciousness of having put a great simple question.

"Oh *dear*, no," exclaimed Mrs. Jermyn, fervently. "At least I cannot imagine that there is. You did not hear anything, did you? If there had been anything detrimental to him to be said, it would certainly have been mentioned at Finch Hall. Mr. Blundell is a little talked about in some quarters, but there cannot be anything *really* of any *consequence* against his character, or Sir John, who is *such* a good judge, and *such* a particular man in every respect, would have been sure to know."

Mrs. Wyndham stared.

How odd! Had Selina really missed that scene at dinner, heard nothing of that little ebullition between Sir John and his son, all about this very Mr. Blundell? So outspoken as Sir John had been! so loud and noisy about it! Mrs. Wyndham thought that nobody present could by any chance have escaped hearing him.

Dear! Did Camilla really mean it? When, how, and where was it? Mrs. Jermyn could hardly believe such a thing. What? Sir John so determined against him? So resolved to have no intercourse? Was Camilla *sure* about it? How *extraordinary*! There must really be something more—more—there must, she was afraid, be *some* truth in the reports spread abroad, which, for her part, she had always hitherto so *strenuously* refused to believe.

Then she looked her desire for more.

Mrs. Wyndham had only been waiting for a pause, and was ready to strike in immediately.

She could not understand how Selina had not *heard* him. Selina was certainly not too far off. Every one round had listened. Pauline had, surely, observed the scene?—had noticed how annoyed young Mr. Finch had been, and how he had done his best to keep his father quiet?

Yes, Pauline allowed, she had. And Pauline had an intuition, amounting to a certainty, that so also had the lady opposite her.

Why Mrs. Jermyn should care to conceal that such was the case she could not conjecture, but of the fact she was certain.

For ends of her own, she was making use of what had escaped from an incautious old man in a fit of ill-temper.

Was Pauline going to be so imposed upon? She dissolved the whole testimony in her scorn, and threw it over.

CHAPTER XVII.

LITTLE THINGS PUT TOGETHER.

"Les absens ont toujours tort."

THE day of departure came at length, and, with a throb of delight, Pauline hailed it as a day of release.

Much, of course, was said about intercourse for the future; rides and drives were planned, and invitations were properly given and accepted.

This would, however, tone down with time; nothing definite was fixed upon; and she had, at all events, the satisfaction of hoping that she might never again be compelled to pass so long a period under the same roof with people whose tastes and feelings were so out of harmony with her own.

For Charlotte alone could she entertain some regard. Charlotte was sincere, and Charlotte had been kind to her.

Minnie was too entirely the reflection of those around her at the moment, to be worth notice; Dot was her mother's child; and that mother was—Mrs. Jermyn.

Of Mr. Jermyn, she could only feel that he had been unfortunate in his choice of a wife, but that, for no reason, was he entitled to be fortunate.

He was inferior in person and in manners, whilst his attainments were purely professional. He wore a civil smile, made a deferential bow, and said the rudest things without being in the least aware he was doing so.

The near neighbourhood of such connections, Pauline decided, must ever be a drawback to the Grange.

Had they been mere acquaintances, the distance—four miles—would have been sufficient to prevent too frequent intrusion; but it was evident that in the present instance it was to be accounted little of.

Mrs. Wyndham's relations must be considered, in a manner, hers. She must be subject, as her aunt would be, to early calls, interruptions at odd hours, and the other penalties of unceremoniousness between two families. There would be incessant notes, arrangements for meeting, and for going into public in company. She foresaw, with a blush of mortification, that she might have again to follow Mrs. Jermyn into a room, and wait for her carriage, on Mr. Jermyn's arm.

Charlotte would kiss her, pull her aside, and whisper; Mrs. Jermyn would tap her with her fan,

and beckon her up, to know with whom she had been talking.

All this she had smarted under already; and the chance of its recurrence was the only alloy in the pleasure with which she seated herself by her aunt's side, and looked back upon the cluster of faces around the hall-door.

"Well, they have been very good and kind," commented Mrs. Wyndham, as the carriage rolled away, amid the vociferous "Good-byes" of the party on the doorstep. "And whatever little faults we might find, Pauline, we will keep to ourselves. We have shared their hospitality, we have partaken of their 'salt,' you know; that will be sufficient for you; for me, they are relations of my dear husband, and, in that light alone I will look upon them."

Pauline was astonished and rebuked.

"They are gone!" cried Charlotte, coming back to the drawing-room. "Gone! And good luck go with them! She is not a bad sort of girl, that Pauline. I have forgiven her defrauding me of Little Fennel, and Dolly, and all her other sins; she has expiated them by going to live with Aunt Camilla!"

Mrs. Jermyn, who had been airily waving her hand, and sending kisses after the retreating carriage, smiled no more directly it was out of sight, and replied to her daughter's tirade in a natural and

cross voice. "Expiated! Nonsense! I don't know what you mean. The girl has fallen on her feet, if ever any one did."

"Humph!" said Charlotte. "That is the sort of fall in which one breaks the legs. When I fall on my feet, may all my bones be whole!"

"Going to a charming place like the Grange," continued her mother. "And Aunt Camilla making so much of her already! Quite as if she were her own daughter!"

"That's what I said," observed her husband with complacency. "I told them they would be taken for mother and daughter wherever they went."

"Did you say it to Camilla? or to Pauline?"

"To both. I said it to them as they were going away."

"Just what she would dislike of all things," muttered Mrs. Jermyn, under her breath.

"Dislike it? Why should she dislike it? You said yourself this minute, that she treated her like a daughter."

"And here is Charlotte thinks it would be a hardship to be so treated," replied his wife, aware that it would be useless to enter into explanations, and returning to the main point. "With every luxury at her command, a poor homeless girl——"

"You would not like it yourself, mamma. At

least, I daresay *you* would, but *I* should not. And as for Pauline, she hates it like poison."

"So she *says*."

"Says? No; she is not likely to say a thing like that. I could not even tempt her to much smaller confidences. But any one with half an eye can see it for themselves. You must, mamma, if you did not choose to be blind."

"But, oh," continued Charlotte, amusement lighting up her countenance, "what a pair they are! How could you, even *you*, mamma, say that they suited one another? There they sat last night on the sofa, side by side. Aunt Camilla was smirking and smiling, and trying to get Pauline to tell her she was young and pretty. *You* tell her so, mamma, every hour of the day; but Pauline—you have no idea how well she did it, or rather did *not* do it. She kept the little aunt in perfect good-humour, and yet she never told a single fib! Says Aunt Camilla, 'My dear, what a pretty hat! What a becoming hat! You look like an old picture—exactly like an old picture! One of the La Sartes come to life again! *Our* ancestors, you know, Pauline. The resemblance is quite remarkable—*quite*.' And so on. Says Pauline, in her slow, soft voice, 'I am glad you like it, Aunt Camilla.' Evidently she would have worn a pie-dish on her head with equal contentment. But

this did not suit the aunt at all, for the upshot of it was, that she wanted to be told it would become *her*. You must know that although part of her great and sudden attachment to Pauline consists in the belief that she is about to introduce to the world another Gunning, she has by no means made up her mind to sink gracefully into the background herself. Indeed she means to shine all the more, 'with the mild magic of reflected light.'"

"I daresay Pauline was very rude and unkind about it. Young people never seem to think that older ones can have any feelings on such subjects at all."

"They went off together arm in arm afterwards, so I don't think the feelings can have been lacerated to any great extent," said Charlotte. "My belief is, that they will shake together, in spite of everything, and Aunt Camilla will claim her half of every young man who finds his way over to the Grange."

"There is one young man who will find his way there, and that ere long, or I am mistaken," observed Mrs. Jermyn.

"One *little* man would be more to the purpose, if you mean Little Fennel," replied Charlotte. "Minnie," as her sister entered, "mamma thinks Little Fennel was hit hard. And so I daresay he was, for though I was his first love, I have never pretended to be

his only one. He is not constant; 'pon my word, now, he isn't. But then one can't be expected to be constant, when there's no return, can one?"

"Oh, don't begin in that stupid way," said Minnie; "there's no fun in it. What were you going to say?"

"To say? When?"

"When I came in. You were going to tell me something——"

"About Little Fennel. I was going to tell you that mamma said he——"

"I never mentioned Mr. Fennel, Charlotte."

"Oh, did you not? Who was it, then? Dolly? I knew it was all up with Dolly directly I saw him come into the room; but he was not allowed to usurp her, I can tell you. As for the beauty herself, I don't think she wished to be troubled with either of them."

"Nor was I thinking of either of them," said her mother.

"No? Well, I have come to an end of my guesses; you must tell me."

"I think I know," said the quieter Minnie. "Mr. Blundell?"

"Mr. Blundell! What are you both dreaming of?" cried Charlotte, as her mother's smile showed that the right name had been spoken. "What put

him into your heads? Because she did not like to hear him spoken against behind his back? You don't know that girl at all. She has not the wits to stand up for herself, but she would not let any one else be attacked, and keep quiet. It is a shame, too. I hate to hear the absent maligned, and given no chance of telling their version of the story; it seems so mean. You might have known it was just the very thing to make Pauline fire up."

"It *seemed* to be, indeed."

"I call that unfair," exclaimed Charlotte, still further roused to generosity of feeling by her mother's sneer. "Now you are turning upon her, mamma. She did not say a word that she might not have said for anybody—not a single word. And as for poor Ralph Blundell, I always feel inclined to take his part, for the very same reason. I believe the only cause of all the outcry against both the brothers, was, that they were better born and better looking than the rest of their neighbours, and that they looked down upon the whole of us."

"They could not well look down on Sir John and Lady Finch," said her mother, angrily.

"Oh, Sir John is an old-fashioned old stick, who wants everybody to be as fusty and musty as he is himself. He will have some trouble in cutting Dolly's

pretty curls to his strait-laced pattern. Dolly hankers after the fun at Blundellsaye."

"His father will be very foolish if he gives in to him," retorted her mother. "No son of mine should consort with Ralph Blundell, if I could help it."

"My dear mother, for two reasons your determination will never be put to the test. Firstly, because you have no son; and secondly, because, if you had a hundred, Monseigneur Ralph would never deign to take notice of one of them."

"Do be quiet for a single minute, Charlotte," said Minnie. "You talk on, and on, and no one else can get in a word. Mamma, what made you say that about Pauline?"

"What made you guess what I was going to say?"

"Oh," replied Minnie, astutely, "because I had heard you say it before."

"To whom?"

"To Aunt Camilla. I heard you hinting about him. I wanted to know how you took up the idea at first."

"Little things put together," replied her mother, rather hastily, as a little thing in the shape of Dot entered. "Nothing in particular, I assure you. Now we have been idling here long enough. Come, Dot, and hold this skein of worsted for me."

She was not to be entrapped into further communications; and with an uneasy sensation of something wrong, she was aware, for the first time, that she would prefer none being made by any one else.

Charlotte's burst of indignation she could not face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIR JOHN FINCH.

“He has put on the strong armour of sickness, he is wrapped in the callous hide of suffering; he keeps his sympathy, like some curious vintage, under trusty lock and key, for his own use only.”

It may have been observed that Mrs. Jermyn, whenever she had an opportunity of introducing the names of Sir John and Lady Finch into her conversation, did not fail to take advantage of it.

As usually happens in such cases, where the acquaintanceship is assumed, on one side, to be especially close, her real knowledge of them was slight.

She had no true perception into the character or habits of either; but she had their visiting-cards on her table, she could describe the interior of their mansion-house, and she could command a bow when their carriage passed hers in the village.

On this foundation she romanced at large to her less fortunate acquaintance; for the Jermyns, although occasionally admitted to the neighbouring country-houses, could not be said to be intimate at

any, but lived chiefly in a small world of their own, composed of the occupants of villas and river-side cottages, of which a considerable number clustered round the hamlet at their gates.

By these they were admired, envied, and imitated. To them would Mrs. Jermyn lay down the law, fearless of correction; and her favourite topic was seldom far from her lips.

Sir John's "little ways" were alluded to, and his "old-fashioned foibles" apologised for, in a way that, could he have heard it, would have brought some of them strongly to the front.

Lady Finch's "unfortunate shyness" was likewise tenderly dealt with. She was really more to be pitied than any one else. It wore off entirely, *entirely*, when alone with her friends. People called her proud, but such an appellation was, she need hardly assure them, *altogether undeserved*. She was a sweet woman.

Even in allowing such little shortcomings, Mrs. Jermyn would appear to have a struggle with herself. She could not but be partial, be blind to anything amiss in such friends. Their interests, she owned, were hers. She called on all to participate in their anxieties, demanded elation for their successes, mournfully claimed sympathy for their bereavements.

Tit-bits of gossip concerning their "kind neighbours at the Hall" must always, she felt, have a superior interest to any other subject, for the little coterie of which she had constituted herself the queen.

"Nice quiet folks, like ourselves," she would thus describe them. "Such stay-at-homes! Sir John never *can* be brought to go anywhere. Lady Finch assures me she exhausts herself in vain. 'Do, dear Mrs. Jermyn, try *your* persuasive powers,' she said to me the other night—we were dining there, you know; she began to me directly after dinner about it: 'Sir John may listen to *you*,' she was good enough to say. She, poor thing, is quite tired of the Hall, and would like to have a few weeks abroad. I sympathised with her entirely. It is hard on a wife, and such a *devoted* wife too, not to be *considered* more. Men, however, never *are* considerate. Sir John, dear good man, is a most excellent husband, to be sure, but he is like the rest in that respect. *My* persuasive powers indeed!" bridling. "What could I say to that? I could only reply, 'Indeed, my dear Lady Finch, I am not vain enough to imagine that where *your* persuasive powers have failed, *mine* would succeed.' She laughed at me, but we understand each other perfectly. Sir John is always most agreeable, most *attentive*; but I hope

I know better than to *misinterpret* that politeness which is one of the distinguishing marks of people of rank. Poor dear Mrs. Wyndham is perhaps a *little* apt to take such civilities as *personal* distinctions. My sister-in-law is a most *amiable* creature, but (to confidential ears) wanting, without doubt, in discretion, in *judgment*. She will, however, be the greatest possible addition to the neighbourhood, and *we* will take care that she is not suffered to make herself ridiculous."

On this point the orator would become diffuse, not to say prosy; for although the glory of the Grange had become in a manner dimmed by the residence of Pauline therein, when not in her actual presence, Mrs. Jermyn still enjoyed much satisfaction from recounting details of the *ménage*, and enumerating the servants, the horses, the carriages, and the visitors of Mrs. Wyndham.

The Finchs had called, of course. They had called among the very *first*. So thoughtful—so like themselves.

Mrs. Jermyn, however, did not know to whom she was ascribing honour.

Dolly Finch had not only instigated his parents to the visit, but he had accompanied them.

He had been loud in his praises afterwards. What charming people they were! What a delight-

ful house it was to go to! Mrs. Wyndham so friendly, so easy! Such a nice, well-mannered woman!

"Why are there not more like her?" cried the young man, enthusiastically. "Usually if there is one thing in the world I hate more than another, it is to make a call. You give up your afternoon, and you ride four or five miles, and you have to get down and open half-a-dozen gates if you go up by a side entrance—besides the nuisance of the door-bell at the end—and all you get for your pains is a pair of cold fingers, and a seat on the ottoman, in the worst part of the whole room to get away from."

"Humph!" returned his father, drily. "It seems to me there was another part of the room, very far from the ottoman, which you found still worse to get away from to-day. I found no difficulty in getting away from the ottoman, but I thought you were never coming out of that *corner*. And as for the house, it is all one abominable draught. I have been shivering ever since I came out of it."

"You were shivering before you went, sir; you complained of it this morning. You have caught cold, standing about in the farmyard yesterday."

"It was not the farmyard; there was nothing in the farmyard to give me cold. It was those hot, unwholesome rooms——"

"Unwholesome? They were delicious. The scent of the flowers——"

"I tell you it was *that* made me ill; I know it was. Nasty sickly atmosphere—enough to poison any human being! And every time the door opened, a gale blew along the ground, and froze one's feet till they were like stones. I would not live in that house if I were paid for it."

Dolly differed from him entirely. He liked the place and everything about it.

His mother agreed with him. Yes, Mrs. Wyndham was agreeable—certainly agreeable, kind, and friendly. Good-looking too.

Dolly thought her uncommonly good-looking. A little bit made up, you know, but what of that? Miss La Sarte is not made up, at all events. She is—ah—rather handsome, is she not?

Not rather—very. A lovely girl. So graceful, so retiring! Such a contrast to those awkward Miss Jermyns! Lady Finch protests that she cannot imagine how they come to belong to the same race.

Hereupon Dolly grows quite excited. There is no relationship, none of any sort. Mrs. Wyndham had made a low sort of marriage, and had got a lot of money, and her husband was dead, and there was no more to be said about it. But with Miss

La Sarte, the Jermyns have nothing to do; Miss La Sarte belongs to a good old family.

He is so intelligible, and so deeply in earnest, that Sir John's two grey eyebrows come to the front, and make a dead point.

Beauty, birth, and money? He thinks it might do.

He will not say more of the discomforts he has undergone; and if that invitation Mrs. Wyndham talked about should come, it must certainly be accepted, even if he should slip out of the engagement afterwards.

There proved to be some cause for the latter provision.

The next day he sat in his great arm-chair by the fire, in all the dignity of sickness.

Slippers encased his feet, a dressing-gown buttoned to his chin, and a shawl overspread his shoulders. His grey locks of hair, instead of curling crisply round each temple as was their wont, were brushed straight. They had not been plunged into water that morning, nor had his beard been trimmed. He was really unwell, and unnaturally docile and meek.

By mid-day Lady Finch sent for the doctor.

He allowed that she had done right. Perhaps the doctor could do him some little good. He was ill—he was exceedingly ill. Headache, and a nasty

depression. He didn't know where. Everywhere. Then he closed his hand and beat his breast sorrowfully, "Pain! pain! pain!"

"I told you you had got a cold, sir," said Dolly, smiling, but not undutifully. "You never would have made such a fuss about those rooms, if there had not been something the matter with you. You don't care what a room is like, as a rule."

"I daresay you are right," mildly rejoined the invalid. "This attack was coming upon me, and that must have been why I felt out of sorts altogether; I ought never to have been out of doors; I know I ought not. What the doctor will say to me——"

"Oh, you'll be all right again in a day or two. You have only to take some gruel, and that sort of thing. What's this?" as a servant entered with a tray.

"Your soup, Sir John," said the man, arranging it by his side.

"My soup? Eh? I didn't order any soup. What am I to do with it? Who sent it?" demanded his master, eyeing the basin, but without ill-will. "I don't know that I want that soup," he continued, irresolutely.

"The best thing in the world for a cold," said

Dolly. "And uncommonly good it smells, too. Heigh-ho! I wish it was dinner-time."

"Do you? Perhaps I may take a little; a mouthful or two. What made you say it was good? I don't know that it's good. I don't like eating soup at this hour; it is just some of Custard's nonsense, sending it," breaking some bread into the bowl as he spoke.

"Don't have it, if you don't want it," said Dolly, whose appetite had been sharpened by a long ride in the cold air. "If you are going to send it down again, give it to me. I'll soon make short work of it."

His evident partiality was as stimulating as a good sauce; more so, indeed, to Sir John, who hated sauces, as he hated everything that was not solid, substantial, and John Bull to the core.

"Oh, I suppose I had better take it," replied he, lifting a spoonful with an air of resignation. "When one is weak and ill as I am, it sets one up a little. I wonder that Dr. Tyndall has not come yet! He should not have been so long in coming, when I sent for him. Did he know it was for *me*, Anne?" to his wife, who entered.

"Oh, how comfortable you look, my dear!" cried she, disregarding his question. "I am so glad to see

you can enjoy your soup. Custard told me she had ordered it for you."

"Humph! I'm playing with it a little." Sir John hung his head, and almost blushed for the relish he had evinced.

"I knew it was that Custard," he continued. "As if I am to be cured by anything *she* can do! If I were on my deathbed she would concoct some trash of a jelly, and imagine nothing more could be needed! The only person who might do me some little good is Dr. Tyndall, and he keeps away. Send for a doctor, and you have as good a chance of getting a policeman when he's wanted."

"He has sent a message just now, to say that he had been called away, but will look in here this evening," said Lady Finch.

"*This evening!* *That's* not when I want him. Am I to wait all that time to know what is the matter with me? Till this evening, indeed! Till he has been round the parish, and attended to every whipper-snapper in it. And how am I to tell what to do for myself, or what to send for, or—or anything? Dr. Tyndall can have no idea how ill I am. That fool of a Thomas has given the wrong message——"

"Thomas was out with me," observed Dolly,

"William, then. One of them. He has been idling away his time in the alehouse——"

"He has not had time to idle, if he has been to Hexley and back."

"I tell you he has. He has made a mess of it somehow. Who saw him? Who received the answer?"

Lady Finch vouched for the authenticity of the answer. She had met the butler on his way to deliver it, and had cross-examined him. The groom who had ridden to Hexley, had met the doctor's gig leaving the village, and had received the message from Dr. Tyndall's own lips.

"And what does 'this evening' mean, I should like to know?" muttered the invalid, relapsing into testiness.

"It may mean any time. Eight o'clock, nine o'clock, ten o'clock. It is too bad" (with rising sharpness) "of Dr. Tyndall to put me off with 'this evening.'"

Eight o'clock Lady Finch pronounced to be the fated hour. Dr. Tyndall was rarely out after eight o'clock. He probably intended to take Finch Hall on his way home.

Sir John humphed, grunted, and fretted as he listened to her.

Three hours still to wait! Three mortal hours, in which there was nothing to be done but sit, sit, sit, and listen to the clock ticking! He did not

want any more of the newspaper. He never went to sleep at that hour. He spurned every overture made to him.

"Three hours! And I haven't eaten a thing to-day! You needn't laugh,"—to Dolly. "I tell you I have not. Nothing but that abominable soup; and why I took it, I can't think. Messes at all hours of the day are enough to give one a fever. I feel much worse than I did, I can assure you. I wish I had thrown that soup out of the window."

"You do not look well, indeed," sympathised his wife.

"*Well?* I tell you I'm *very ill*. I can't get any one of you to understand how ill I am. If a proper account had been sent of me by William, that doctor could never have had the face to put me off with 'this evening.'"

"Oh come, sir," said Dolly, "you are getting round, or you would not be so lively. You were altogether too mild and tearful just now; I was growing really alarmed. You must be a long way better—"

"I tell you I'm *not* better!"

Dolly spread his hands, and pulled a face.

"I'm *not* better," continued his father, angrily. "You are just making a fool of me. None of you have any feeling."

"Dolly, be quiet," said his mother. "Your father is very uncomfortable and feverish."

"Uncomfortable! Is that all you call it?"

"I said feverish, dear. And since you dislike so much waiting for Dr. Tyndall, let us send over to R—— for Dr. Bell. Thomas can ride over at once. Shall I ring?"

"No, no." He would not have Dr. Bell; he disliked strangers; and, twenty to one, Dr. Bell would be off on some wild-goose chase too! It was not worth while sending, for he should not see him if he came. Dr. Tyndall understood his constitution. It was too bad of Dr. Tyndall not to have obeyed his summons sooner; but still he would wait for Dr. Tyndall, and none other would he have.

The suggestion had done its part, however. It had given him something to think and speak about. He was now willing to lie back in his chair again, and pat his hands softly together, and discuss the probable cause of the doctor's delay.

Was there any one ill in the neighbourhood? Had he been sent for, to any distance? Had he gone to London?

The groom attested that he had not gone to London. He had driven off in the opposite direction: he had no luggage, and—Sir John was in the act of listening, and the butler was in the act of

delivering the message, when the door-bell rang, with a sharp, authoritative demand.

"Dr. Tyndall's ring, Sir John," said the man, with a smile; and in a few moments afterwards, Dr. Tyndall walked in.

Finding that he should have to be out again that night, he had come, on second thoughts, to Finch Hall first. He was sorry to hear that Sir John was unwell. What was the matter? Cold? Bilious attack?

The patient gave himself little airs.

Well, no. He did not think he was bilious. His liver might perhaps be a little affected. Dr. Tyndall would remember how very ill he had been from his liver some years before. He thought he felt something of the same sort this time, only worse. What were the exact symptoms of liver complaint?

The doctor restrained his countenance, and mentioned several.

"And I have no appetite," continued the invalid. "I thought I had a little just now, but it's gone. They gave me some nasty soup, that took it all away again."

"You took the soup?"

"I took it—yes, a little. I wish now I had let it alone. You don't approve of such rubbish, I am sure, Dr. Tyndall? These women," contemptuously,

"they have no sense; they are made up of fiddle-faddle crotchets."

At the end of a quarter of an hour he was more composed; he had been dictated to, sympathised with, and prescribed for.

All was going on satisfactorily, when, as ill luck would have it, the visitor rose.

"You are not going yet!" cried Sir John, from the depths of his arm-chair. "You have hardly come in. Do you mean to say you can't sit down for five minutes?" He was hurt, and a sense of desertion stole over him. "Can't you stay and have some dinner?" he continued, almost plaintively. "Let your carriage go, and we will send you home."

But Dr. Tyndall arrested the order.

It must be owned that he had a certain pleasure in saying "No;" that he felt all the importance of being hurried from one great house to another, as he announced that "home" was not his destination; he had been summoned to Blundellsaye.

It was this visit which he had feared would detain him until the evening. He had been actually on his way there, when Sir John's messenger overtook him, and it was not until after it was too late to recall the man, that it had occurred to him to alter the arrangement.

Sir John inquired, still with something of the

peevishness of an injured man, which of the mad-caps had sent for him.

The doctor was unable to say. In fact—with a little irritability—no proper message had been despatched.

He had met the drag, with a party in it, near the station, and a footman had jumped down and run after him, with a request that he would go up to the house at once.

Not having the pleasure of Mr. Ralph Blundell's acquaintance, he had not looked into the carriage. Some one had bawled out to the man that they would be late for the train, and they had rattled off before he could understand clearly what was required of him.

Nevertheless, he must go, and with a motion of his hand he put aside further entreaties. They had to yield; and a dull evening, unenlivened by his cheerful chat, was endured by all.

It was late ere the doctor left Blundellsaye that night, and he was there again betimes on the following morning. On his way he was overtaken by Mrs. Jermyn and her daughter, who were driving over to spend a few days at the Grange. The ladies pulled up, and he was consulted about Dot's second teeth, and the illness of a servant.

Then the waggonette took the lead, for the day

was raw, and the doctor had enclosed himself in his brougham, which could not keep pace with the lighter vehicle. Also, he had halts to make, at one house and another. He made his bow, and they drove on.

"You have *indeed* been well received, my dear Camilla," began Mrs. Jermyn after luncheon, during which full accounts of the past fortnight's doings had been given and hearkened to. "You are now fairly established as one of *ourselves*. But I said how it would be. It is the *siege*, you know, the siege that was prognosticated."

"Come along with me," said Charlotte to Pauline. "Mamma and aunt Camilla like to palaver to each other, with nobody by to listen or interfere with them. They will '*dear,*' and '*quite,*' and '*so,*' as happily as possible, for the next two hours. Now tell me all you have got to tell. What have you been about since you came? How do you get on together? And has she sent for the hat, yet?"

Pauline could not choose but smile.

"You have no idea how kind she is, Charlotte; nor how little silly she can be, when—when we are quite alone."

"When mamma is not with her? Eh? I dare-say. And so you are not absolutely bored to death, yet? You poor soul! I do pity you. And what

says the Little Fennel to it all? And did Dolly come with the Finches?"

"Dolly? Oh yes," said Pauline, dreamily. "I wonder who is ill, in this direction? Aunt Camilla allows Dr. Tyndall to drive through the grounds, as he used to do before she came, if he has to go that way; and this is the second time he has passed up the Long Avenue to-day."

"I can tell you," said Charlotte, with an odd look in her face. "Mamma would say you would not thank me, but of course that's nonsense. Only I know," she added, looking, with an assumption of entire carelessness, the other way, "that it is not pleasant hearing of anything happening to—to one's brother's friends. Mr. Blundell has got typhoid fever."

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Walford, Lucy Bethia

Pauline

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